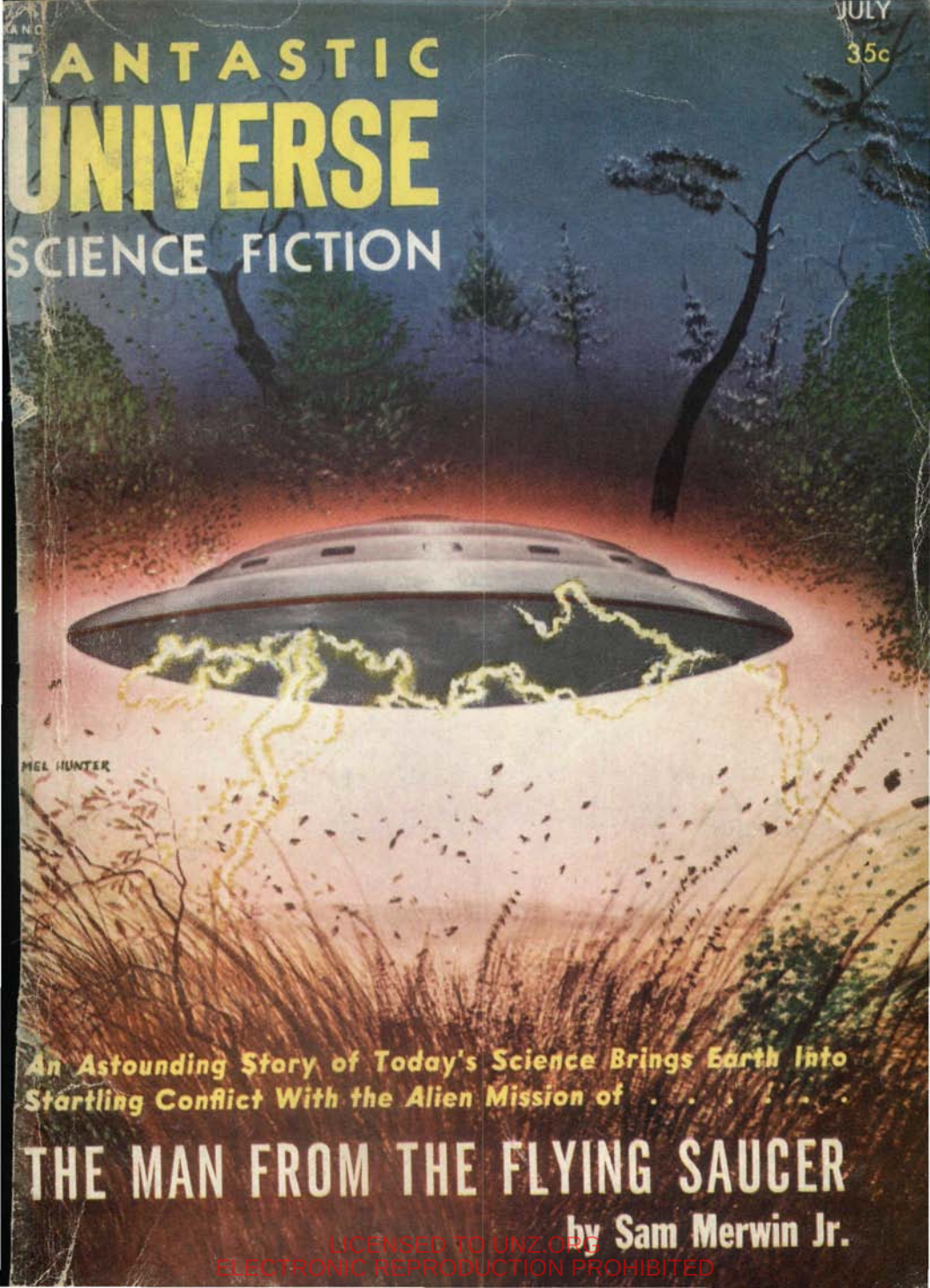
JULY
35c
FANTASTIC
UNIVERSE
SCIENCE FICTION
MEL HUNTER
An Astounding Story of Today's Science Brings Earth Into Startling Conflict With the Alien Mission of . . . . . .
THE MAN FROM THE FLYING SAUCER
by Sam Merwin Jr.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

NO HUMAN eye watches it descend.

It is a precision instrument flawlessly constructed, a traveler from the glowing depths of the night sky designed to cross the interstellar dark with the graceful ease of a pearly nautilus tide-caressed by a tropical sea.

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It is completely transparent from within, but a man could crouch for centuries watching it and see only the shining opacity of its outer skin.

It is so functionally beautiful that even the green and russet splendor of the autumn landscape seems visibly to diminish as it descends, to shrivel by contrast into a withered mockery of that ideal beauty which must be perfect if it is to exist at all.

"When I was built the stars sang together," it seems to whisper. "I am a wayfarer birdlike and miraculous, a stormy petrel gilded by the unimaginable radiance of first-magnitude suns in a spiral nebula so remote that its receding speed is that of light a hundred times multiplied."

No human eye watches it. No human mind knows or even suspects that it is a deadly nuclear time bomb. A flying saucer, yes, but it is also a time bomb that could destroy with a single blast the green hills and valleys and every human habitation on Earth.

How radiant and beautiful it seems as it settles gently to Earth. Meanwhile, man's activities go on and his chances of discovering it before he destroys himself with a time bomb of his own devising is of no great moment perhaps. In either event, all of the lights everywhere will go out. Unless—its unseen pilots have an inexplicable aversion for the sights, sounds and odors of Earth, and the flying disc goes tick-tocking away again, headed for some far less inhospitable region of space.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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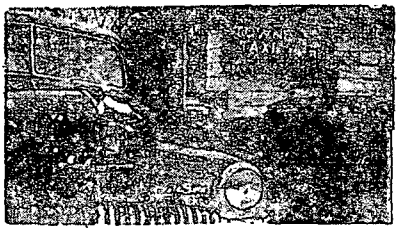

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the man from the flying saucer

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

Rosemarie Burns found it hard to believe that great, wise beings from beyond the stars could have feet of clay—and be likable too!

IT WAS at exactly 7:48 A.M. on February 11, 1955, that the "meteor" crashed through the roof of Innisfail Cottage and struck Rosemarie Burns. She was carrying an eggnog to the bedroom of her father, F. McCool Burns, and when the visitor from space struck her a glancing, slashing blow on the right hip, it caused her to drop the tray, which in turn caused the eggnog to flow all over the carpet.

Her first thought, on seeing the odd-looking object that hit the rug with a heavy thud, was that the plaster had finally given way. Then, looking up, she saw that it had not come from the ceiling. It had torn a hole right through the living room wall, high up near the ceiling but not through the ceiling itself.

Her father, red of eye and green of pajamas, emerged from his room, looking annoyed, sleepy and mildly alarmed. He said, "Rosie, didn't I hear you scream?" Then, seeing the mess on the carpet, he stared at her in consternation, and exclaimed reproachfully: "What made you spill my eggnog?"

Rosemarie was ordinarily a young woman of sweet and willing dis-

There are two ways of glorifying the adventurous wayfarer in his odyssey through Space and Time. Homer achieved it by making his legendary heroes prodigious in body and mind—Aristophanes with peals of laughter. Sam Merwin has here used the Aristophanian approach, and gone a step further by making his protagonists flying saucer folk, so humanly appealing they'll linger warmly and vividly in your memory despite their tragicomic woes.

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position. The Burns neighbors, who admired her, and her fellow teachers at the local high school, who both liked and respected her, often hinted that she was *too* sweet and willing. Else why should she spend so much of her free time waiting slavishly on her father? How could she be blind to the fact that outside of his small circle of familiars at the Shamrock Tavern, F. McCool Burns was generally rated a sponge in every sense of that often misapplied word?

What they did not know was that Rosie had promised her mother, when that sweet little lady lay dying of pneumonia, to take care of her sire for as long as he should live. Had they known, they might have understood, for Rosie, like her mother, was a woman of her word. Besides, she loved the old reprobate, not only because he was her father but because he could when he chose charm the leaves off a brass shamrock, or even the plain garden variety.

However, on the morning when the meteor struck her, Rosie lost her temper. The causes of this dereliction were many and included the temperature, which was down below freezing, her work, which meant a huge stack of term's-end test-papers to correct, and her love-life, which was nonexistent. To which might have been added such minor annoyances as a heater that had gone out during the night, and a stove which had stubbornly refused to light for ten minutes, thus putting her that much behind schedule.

So Rosie blew her carrot-red top. Looking her father straight in his bloodshot eyes, she cried, "What made me spill your eggnog, dad? I'll tell you what made me spill it. I just felt like dropping it on the floor so you could enjoy the luxury of imagining yourself a kitten and lapping it off the carpet."

Then, aghast at what she had said and wilting under the wounded expression in F. McCool Burns' bleary eyes, she pointed at the strange object on the floor and gulped, "That—that thing came through the side of the house and almost knocked me down." So saying, she burst suddenly and violently into tears.

F. McCool, who had moments of affection for his daughter when he was not completely absorbed by self-solicitude, concern over the Sweepstakes draws, and the problem of how to maintain his credit at the Shamrock without going to work, looked at Rosie with sudden concern.

"Why, Rosie," he said, "your dress is torn, and I do believe you're bleeding. Are you hurt?"

"No!" cried Rosie with a return flash of anger. "I'm just terribly, terribly angry."

Then she looked down, saw the jagged rip in her second-best school dress and the great, raw, blister-edged bruise in the exposed flesh underneath. A startling pallor

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overspread her face and she keeled over in a dead faint.

When she came to, she was still stretched on the carpet, and F. McCool was holding the missile in his uncallused hands and examining it with a frown. He had apparently forgotten all about his daughter.

When she got unsteadily to her feet, he said, "At first I thought it was a brick. But nobody shoots bricks from cannon, and it would take a cannon to shoot a brick through the wall. What do you think it is, Rosie?"

"I'm not thinking, I'm too angry," she replied.

As if she had not spoken, her father went on with, "Anyone can see it isn't a brick. It's too long, and far too heavy. And look at these odd markings." He paused to regard his daughter shrewdly. "You know what I'm thinking? I'm remembering that woman last year who was struck by a meteor very much like this one. At least, they called it a meteor. But the way they made hush-hush of it, I wonder if it really wasn't something else."

Like many a quarter-educated man who is fond of barside conversations, F. McCool had picked up a vast smattering of information and misinformation which enabled him to talk with fluency on virtually every imaginable subject. He moved over to the window to examine the inarticulate visitor more closely.

"If this were a meteor, it should show signs of having been carbonized by its friction with the air," he said thoughtfully. "But there are no pits or other signs of burning. Rosie, its shape isn't like that of any meteor I ever heard of. It looks almost *machined*. I'm beginning to wonder—"

"You'd better begin to wonder about how we're going to get the hole in the wall repaired," said Rosie. "And you'd better call the school and tell them I've had an accident and won't be in today. And before you hang up call Dr. Ryan too and tell him to come over and look at me. The place where I got hit is beginning to hurt."

With what dignity she could muster, Rosie limped off toward her bedroom. She didn't for a moment expect her father to follow her instructions. It was an odds-on bet she'd have to do the calling herself. But she wanted to be decently covered before she did anything else. Besides, it did her spirit good to give orders for a change.

Yet, when she emerged from the bathroom, clad decently in her wool-nylon dressing gown, after applying an emergency coating of iodine to her bruised side, F. McCool was just hanging up the hall telephone.

He said gravely, "The school says to take care of yourself. They'll move your tests to the last day of the examination period. Dr. Ryan is on his way, and I've called the roofing people. All right?"

"One thing I'll say for you,

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dad," she told him, sitting down on the sofa carefully, so as not to aggravate her injuries, "you always do the unexpected. Just when I'm about to toss in the towel you arise and shine. Thanks—and give me a cigarette."

Since Rosie usually never smoked, he regarded her with concern and said, "You sure you want one, Macushla?"

"Right now I need one more than ever before in my life." She was too upset to be suspicious at her sire's unwonted show of affection, and it would not have mattered anyway, since it was already too late.

F. McCool was temperamentally incapable of letting such an opportunity pass him by. While his daughter was out of the room, he had already called the local newspapers as well as the wire-service man to tell them that Rosemarie Burns, of Innisfail Cottage, had that morning been spectacularly struck by a meteor.

II

At close quarters it didn't look like a saucer at all. It was circular, true. But while its perimeter tapered to thinness, it was too thick in its central section to resemble either a gigantic dish or a discus. Through variations of power drive, it could navigate space at a speed faster than that of light, or be maneuvered like a child's kiddie car in the relatively dense atmosphere of Earth. Since its home base was on a planet 73.1647 light-years from the Solar System its mission of observation demanded both sorts of speed and control.

So completely was its central cabin insulated against the effects of acute acceleration and deceleration—to say nothing of the temperature extremes encountered in interstellar travel—that its crew of three might well have thought themselves still hovering above their home planet. This planet was known—by rough semantic approximation—as *Karpsb* in their language, but it had no name at all in any terrestrial tongue, since no telescope of Earth had discovered it. It could be said with certainty, however, that it was very similar to the planet under observation, namely the terrestrial globe itself.

Save for the clothing they wore, which was gossamer light and almost transparent, its crew of three looked remarkably human. And therein lay the rub. The dominant species of the planet *Karpsb* had developed their practical science to an amazing degree, but its individual members *were* remarkably human. Along with the brilliance and virtue of its better specimens, the alien race possessed a full quota of thieves as well as heroes, half-wits as well as super-Einsteins, and just plain misfits—known as *knalps* in the vernacular of *Karpsb*.

Flark and Smandr, observer-captain and pilot-engineer respectively of the starship *Dimspt*, were

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no super-Einsteins. They were, however, trained, intelligent young men, well equipped to carry out their mission of observing that portion of Earth known to the natives as North America. But Rejb, the mechanic-orderly assigned to the *Dimspt* by the selector system of *Karpsb* job-appointments bureau, was a *knalp*.

He was strong, he was physically adaptable, he was good-natured, and he carried out orders to the letter. Confronted by the mildest sort of emergency, he fell into a state of emotional confusion. He had even been known to commit the unspeakable and the *zompr* when confronted with a problem not covered by his immediate instructions.

On the morning of February 11, 1955, the *Dimspt* had been engaged in a routine patrol sweep from west to east, some forty miles above that section of North America known to the natives as the United States. Suddenly, and without warning an emergency arose, and Rejb fell apart at the seams.

The ship was on automatic control and Smandr was taking a rest-shift in his bunk. Flark was studying the tele-receivers, picking up news reports and flashes of Muggs and Garroway, interspersed with the songs of Betty Clooney and the caustic humor of Jack Paar, solely in the interests of cultural observation.

Without warning, an atmosphere power-capsule had conked out. That in itself was not a serious failure since all that was ordinarily required to slip a replacement into the fuel tank was to push a pale pink button on the control panel. But the replacement-rack had jammed the night before and Rejb was engaged in putting it back together again at the precise moment when the capsule blew.

Feeling the ship veer off-course, and realizing what must have happened, Rejb swung a metal repair-tool with all his strength at the dismantled rack, in a desperate attempt to knock another capsule into the tank. It must be conceded that such behavior was not unreasonable, especially for Rejb.

The only trouble was that he swung too hard, and that while a starship of *Karpsb* is an almost foolproof instrument, it is not and was never intended to be a target for such blows as Rejb struck. His follow-through carried past the capsule rack, struck the release lever on the rhodomagnetic-matrix case and sent one of the precious star-power briquettes flying directly through the disposal chute and out of the ship.

It was then that Rejb panicked. He came bursting into the control-observation chamber, his eyes goggling, and stuttered, "F-F-F-Flark, I j-j-just lost the last of our star-power briquettes. It was an accident, I s-swear it."

Flark, whose anti-procreational shots were beginning to wear off, since the *Dipmst* was nearing the

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end of its mission, had been enjoying a Betty Clooney love ballad more than he was supposed to. He looked up in annoyance, and said, "Give it to me again, Rejb."

Rejb was halfway through when a thoroughly aroused Smandr stormed into the chamber. "This halfwit *zompred* right through the bunkroom!" he said. "If home office ever learns there's been *zompring* on an Earth mission, we're as good as washed out. You midge-brained idiot, won't you ever—"

With his eyes flashing caustically, Flark interrupted the pilot-engineer. He said, "You haven't heard the worst of it yet, Smandr. From what I've been able to gather, our brilliant friend here just knocked our last star-power briquette out the disposal chute."

Smandr paled, and clapped a hand to his brow. "Oh, *no!*" he choked, sinking into a seat. Then, turning on Rejb and drawing upon what little patience he could still muster, he demanded, "Tell us exactly how it happened."

When Rejb finished, the pilot-engineer looked at the observer-captain, and affirmed bitterly, "Well, that does it. We've got to get the briquette back or we'll be stuck on this mission indefinitely. And when our shots wear off, we'll most likely go out of our minds. I'm even beginning to think these Earthgirls you get on the screen look good."

"I was just thinking of that," said Flark, regarding with distaste the clowning of J. Fred Muggs on the screen—antics which he had heretofore come to regard with amusement.

Smandr swung on the quaking Rejb, and said accusingly, "It was not enough for you to lose our return briquette last Earth-year. Oh, no! You had to bide your time until you could send our reserve briquette out through the chute! Do you mind telling me how you expect to get us back to *Karpsb* without a rhodomagnetic matrix? Are you planning to get in back and push?"

"I didn't do it on purpose," said Rejb, thereby adding injury to insult. "Why can't we call for a refueling job from the South American mission? Surely, they would not—"

"You know the penalty for a refueling summons," said Flark quietly. "It means the loss of four ratings for all of us. Four ratings! That would put *you* somewhere below zero, since you only have two ratings now."

"That's right," Smandr chimed in. "Rejb, you got us into this mess, and it's up to you to get us out. Put the tracer on it—no, I'll do it. You might send the tracer through the disposal chute. But you'd better start praying the briquette didn't fall into the middle of Lake Michigan. The quicker the better—*because you're going to have to go down and get it back.*"

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Furiously, Smandr flicked on the switches that keyed the tracer to the atomic register of the lost briquette and got it working. After a few moments, he looked up and said, "Only a born *zomprer* could pull a repeat fumble like this. Rejb, you've hit another house!" He added, meaningfully, "You know what that means? It means you're going to have to get it back from Earthfolk. And if you *zompr* or do anything else to betray your identity, we'll have to maroon you. Understand?"

Rejb nodded and quavered, "Are you fellows sure I'm just the man for this job? I mean—" His voice trailed off under the steely regard of his superiors. He said, "All right, how do you want me to swing it?"

III

It was Dr. Ryan who first made Rosie Burns aware of her betrayal by F. McCool—in a quite innocent remark after he had examined the meteor burn and pronounced it painful but undangerous. He was putting a dressing on the wound when he said with a headshake, "I never thought I'd be treating a meteor-burn. I've had to handle about everything else in my time, but I doubt if one person in fifty million gets grazed by a meteor."

Rosie sat up abruptly, almost knocking off the dressing. She said, "Has my father been talking about it?"

"He did mention what happened when he called me," said Dr. Ryan. "To say that I was astounded would be putting it mildly."

Like her mother, Rosie was a young woman who dreaded the spotlight in any form. She hoped—perhaps in negative response to her father's love of being in the public eye—to live out her life in quiet service to her community. In the seven years since she had come of legal age, she had grown increasingly aware of the fact that none of the eligible males in the community would risk having F. McCool on their hands by marrying her.

She had resigned herself to a life of teaching with, perhaps, a spot of sabbatical-year travel after her sire was summoned to greener pastures. The very thought of publicity made her shudder.

She said earnestly, "Doctor, promise me you won't let this go any further. *Promise me!*" There was a fervent appeal in her beguiling blue eyes that no male could have long resisted.

Dr. Ryan said, "I won't say a word—on my honor as a physician. But how are you planning to keep F. McCool quiet?"

"I'll make him shut up," said Rosie, with a determination that caused the doctor to regard her with increased respect.

"I wish you luck with it," he began, "but your father isn't an easy man to—" He was interrupted by the doorbell.

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At first, Rosie stubbornly refused to talk to the reporters or pose for the insistent photographer who came with them. But F. McCool said, in his most cajoling manner, "Macushla, I won't deny I've been a millstone around your pretty neck all these years. But now, when I see a way to rise above my misfortune, and make myself an independent man of means, you wouldn't be blocking me?"

"Just how do you propose to rise above misfortune, dad?" Rosie asked him, and there was bitterness in her voice.

"Promotion, my dear—promotion," said her father quickly. "Remember, you're a miracle that's happened twice—like that lady last year, you've been struck by a meteor and lived to tell of it. You're not going to keep the big mystery in back of it a secret, are you?"

"You yourself said it didn't look like a meteor," said Rosie, eyeing her parent with embattled suspicion. "It was probably just a brick or something that fell out of an airplane."

"Nonsense!" cried F. McCool. "I was hardly awake when I first laid eyes on it. It's a visitor from outer space, for sure. The papers and magazines will be full of it."

"A nine-days' wonder," said Rosie with contempt.

"Not if we play our cards right," F. McCool replied. "*This* meteor is going on display—before the big scientific boards first, and then before the public. There'll be magazine stories and television appearances, perhaps even a movie. We'll be rich."

Rosie looked to Doctor Ryan for help. "Is there anything in what he says?"

Doctor Ryan shrugged thoughtfully. "Well," he said, "I've always heard a good promoter must be a good talker, and your father is certainly that. He might *just possibly* swing it."

"If Rosie will only cooperate," said F. McCool, gaining new assurance from this unexpected quarter. "Say you'll do it, Macushla."

"I know when I'm licked," said Rosie. "Send them in and let's get it over with. I just hope the school doesn't fire me."

"And why would they be doing that?" countered her father. "You'll be making them famous, too!"

If Doctor Ryan hadn't stood by, it is doubtful if Rosie could have survived the ordeal which ensued. The questions were bad enough. What did she eat for breakfast, what subjects did she teach, who were her boyfriends, if any. But the pictures were worse. Like any modest young woman outside of show-business, Rosie was shocked at the idea of appearing scantily attired in the privacy of her own home.

But the reporter had a persuasive way with him. "Oh, come on, Miss Burns. We've got to have a picture of the injury itself. You'd show

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a lot more on the beach in summer."

And she was licked again. She went through with it, but she felt like taking a hot cleansing shower at the termination of the interview.

All she really wanted, after the tribulations of the morning, was to be left alone. When F. McCool suggested that she give him five dollars to stand treat at the Shamrock Tavern in honor of the occasion she lacked the resilience to put up an argument. After his departure the phone started ringing. Rosie didn't answer it, and, after a torturing five minutes the unknown caller gave up, and silence, blessed silence, surrounded her.

She was looking with considerable curiosity at the strange object which was the source of her present misfortunes, when the doorbell jangled loudly. Rosie refused to rise from the living room sofa. Softly she muttered, "Go back to your graves, you ghouls!"

Then she heard the door open. Her father had evidently forgotten to lock it behind him, and she had been too angry and upset, both mentally and physically, to check up on it as usual. She assembled a fine full torrent of outraged invective to shower on the strange young man who entered and stood in the doorway, twiddling his hat.

But he spoke first—with a shy, polite concern that put dampers on her temper. He asked if she was Miss Rosemarie Burns and then, when she nodded, went on quickly with: "I'm Jim Lawrence—department of astro-physics at the State University. I'd like to discuss the possibility of our purchasing or borrowing the meteor that struck you for examination by our group. That is, if you feel well enough to discuss it right now."

Rosie was a pushover for politeness, and the pleasantly smiling young man was offering her the first ray of politeness she had known for almost the whole of a horrible day. Furthermore, he was tall, and broad-shouldered, with curly brown hair that made her heart skip a beat.

She said, pointing toward the table by the couch, "It's lying right there. You're welcome to look at it if you wish."

"Thank you, Miss Burns." He approached the table in three quick strides and picked the meteor up. He said, "Hmmm," and, "I wonder," and "It just *could* be, if it tests out."

Getting a little restless under his lack of regard, Rosie said, "Why don't you take your coat off? It's rather warm in here."

He looked at her, startled. Then he smiled charmingly and said, "Thanks, I will. Sorry I got so absorbed, but this is a very remarkable object. I hope you weren't hurt badly."

His solicitude pleased Rosie. "More in my self esteem than anywhere else," she said, quickly. "There's something almost—well,

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embarrassing—in being struck by a meteor."

"I hadn't thought of it in exactly that light, but—yes, I see what you mean." His smile was enchanting. Then, turning serious, he added, "I'd like to take this with me when I leave. That is if we can come to a satisfactory agreement as to its purchase or rental. Like other universities we don't have unlimited funds. But I believe I am prepared to make a satisfactory offer in either case."

At that moment, Rosie felt any offer from so handsome and charming a young man would be more than satisfactory—and it wouldn't have to be limited to meteors, either. Furthermore, as a schoolteacher, she felt infinitely more in sympathy with this sort of exploitation than with the sordidly commercial use her father was proposing to make of the incident.

She dimpled her best and said, "I feel sure we can come to a mutually satisfactory understanding."

A new voice spoke from the doorway, which had unfortunately remained unlocked. It was a deep male voice and it said, "I'm sorry, but you'll have to wait. Security has given the Air Force priority on all possible UFO's. I have orders to pick this meteorite up."

The newcomer wore an Air Force uniform with a pair of silver eagles on his slate-blue shoulder straps. He stood straight as a ramrod, and spoke with the authority of a man accustomed to giving orders and having them instantly obeyed. Rosie disliked him on sight.

With a determined glint in his dark eyes, Jim Lawrence rose to battle. "I'm sorry," he said, "but this young lady has first priority. After all, it landed in her living room and inflicted physical damage on her. What's more, she has already tentatively come to an agreement with me."

The Air Force colonel shook his head, his face grim. "I'm very sorry, Miss," he said, addressing Rosie directly. "We have top priority instructions, completely covering this contingency. They give us legal right to preempt your Unidentified Flying Object."

For once, Rosie found herself at a loss for words. But Jim Lawrence refused to be intimidated. He said, angrily: "What about compensation? You have no right to deprive Miss Burns of reasonable compensation for the injury she has suffered. She might have profited greatly from her misfortune, if she hadn't preferred to accept a more modest offer from me."

"I'm afraid," said the colonel, "the matter of compensation will be up to Air Force Procurement to decide." He turned back to Rosie and went on, earnestly, "I can assure you that they'll be most generous—if this particular UFO turns out to be valuable."

Rosie found her voice at last.

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"And if it doesn't?" she asked quietly.

"In that event," said the colonel, "I can assure you that their payment to you will still be generous, and take full account of the circumstances. In any case—"

"In any case," said Jim Lawrence firmly, "I think you ought to show Miss Burns your papers."

"Of course." The colonel nodded obligingly and whipped out a document which was complete and indisputable, proclaiming him to be Colonel Willis Parker, USAF, Procurement Officer for the Strategic Airbase a few miles to the west of the town. Colonel Parker stared at Jim Lawrence and added, "If you don't mind, I'd like to see *your* identification."

Jim Lawrence fished around, and dragged out his wallet, complete with identity card, driver's license, twenty-three dollars in crisp new bills, a half-dozen laundry slips and three rent receipts.

Colonel Lawrence scanned each item carefully, nodded, and returned the wallet to its owner. He said, "I've heard of you, Dr. Lawrence. I rather wish we were working together on this."

Before either Rosie or Lawrence could think of anything more to say, Colonel Willis had deftly plucked the meteorite from the table, bidden Rosie a polite farewell and marched out of the house. Seconds later, the roar of a motor sounded and the colonel reappeared, sitting beside a uniformed chauffeur in an Air Force staff car. The car passed the living room window in the deepening twilight and was lost to view in a tree-screened forking of the roadway just beyond.

"He didn't even leave a receipt," said Lawrence mournfully.

"Yes, he did—here!" Rosie picked up a neatly folded ship of paper. "He must have made it out before he left the airbase."

"Cocky devil!" muttered Lawrence, unhappily. Then summoning an embittered, angry defiance he added: "I'm still a major in the Marine Corps Reserve. Colonel Willis and his hot-shot, fly-boy bosses may not know it, but they're in for a fight. They can't get away with this for long."

"Come on Marines," said Rosie and instantly regretted the remark, for Jim Lawrence was looking at her suspiciously, as if fearful that she might be kidding him. She added, hastily. "It's the title of an old movie they show on TV. But I really mean it."

She hoped he believed her.

Lawrence picked up his hat and coat. He said, "I'm sorry for what happened. But we're going to correct it. My first task is to get the ball rolling. So long for now, Miss Burns."

"So long—Jim," she said, feeling deliciously timid.

He turned in the doorway, and gave her a long look. He said, "Rosie, if they had had teachers like you in school when I was a

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kid, I'd have made it a point never to graduate."

Rosie was still immersed in a happy afterglow when F. McCool came home from the Shamrock Tavern enveloped in his own by no means novel glow of Old Jamieson and big plans for a roseate future. He tossed his hat at the windowseat, saw it fall short of the mark, and exclaimed undauntedly:

"Mavourneen, this is a great day for the Burnses of Innisfail Cottage. I've been in touch with some *very* important people, and I can promise you right now, as sure as I'm standing here, that the lean days are over." Beaming, he advanced toward his daughter and said, "You look upset. Why?"

"I've got news for *you*," she told him. "A man from the university was here awhile ago. He wanted to buy or rent the meteor for study by the department of astrophysics."

F. McCool sat down and pondered that unexpected development. After a moment, he said, "Faith, and that might not be a bad start at all. It would build up prestige and keep the bidding alive, and all the while we'd be drawing a tidy little income from the eggheads."

"I was going to let them have it," said Rosie, "but—"

"But like the good, dutiful girl you are, you wouldn't take such a step without consultin' your old dad."

"I have more news for you, old dad," said Rosie. She sat down opposite him and told him about the arrival of Colonel Willis and what had happened.

F. McCool was like a man cruelly and suddenly stricken with a paralysis—a paralysis which affected every member but his tongue. Sitting stonily in his chair, he fumed against fate, and the Air Force with an equally distributed ferocity. So forceful were his vituperations, that he did not hear the doorbell until it had rung twice.

Then he rose, a trifle unsteadily, and said, "I'm going to make somebody pay for this. I'm going to—" He opened the door and demanded vociferously, "Just who are you and what would you be wanting?"

A voice with odd accents came booming into the living room. It said, "My name, sir, is Smith—Ivan Smith—and I've come to offer a million dollars in cash for the briquette that fell through your roof this morning."

IV

"Don't be standing out there in the cold, man," roared F. McCool. "Come on in, and show us the color of your money."

As Ivan Smith moved awkwardly into the living room, Rosie thought, for a dizzily terrifying instant, that she was looking at a ghost. She had never seen such pallor, not even on her father's late Uncle Mike, when he had been released from prison after serving

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two years for assaulting the chief of police with a shillaleh. For the rest, he wore an ill-fitting dark suit and overcoat beneath a set of kindly, undistinguished features and frightened-looking eyes. The eyes were almost as unnerving as the man's incredible pallor, and their odd, light tint made her think he must be suffering from jaundice.

He said, "I've got it all here." From the bulging pockets of his overcoat, he drew out a half-dozen thick packages of folding currency and added, "We—that is, I—didn't think you'd want it *all* in big bills. These are thousands, these are hundreds, these are fifties, these are twenties and these are tens. This smaller packet has quite a few bills in ten thousand dollar denominations. You'll find it comes to exactly one million dollars." He paused, then added anxiously, "I hope you'll find it sufficient."

"Well," said F. McCool, regarding the packages like a man hypnotized, "I guess it'll do for a starter."

"Dad!" said Rosie from the sofa. "Haven't you something to tell Mr. Smith?"

The newcomer appeared then to notice Rosie for the first time. As his eyes rested on her definitely feminine young body his eyes seemed literally to light up. He said, "I fear I have not yet had the honor—"

Rosie said, "I'm Miss Burns and that—briquette, I think you called it—belongs to me by virtue of its having struck me as it fell."

Ivan Smith looked horrified. "It struck you? I'm so very sorry. I had no idea. I—I hope it didn't hurt you badly."

"Mostly my feelings," she replied tartly. "And why are you staring at me like that? Haven't you ever seen a woman before?"

"Not in a very long time," he exclaimed, admiringly. "And never one as—as *schrasslink* as you."

"Oh, I don't believe that," said Rosie, wishing he'd look the other way—*any* other way. "I'm not especially *schrasslink*. If I am, the boys around here failed completely to notice it. What is *schrasslink*, anyway, if you don't mind?"

He looked as if she'd just shot him. She had to repeat the question before the answer came, slow and hesitating. "It means all the *good* things in a woman rolled up into one wonderful package. I hope you're not offended."

"I hope so too," Rosie replied, baffled. Then she turned to her father. "I wish you'd stop drooling over that money, dad, and tell Mr. Smith exactly what happened to our briquette or whatever it was?"

"Something *happened* to it?"

Rosie began to wonder if the newcomer had any clear understanding of his own peculiarities.

"Now take it easy, young man," said her father. "Nothing's happened at all that cannot be fixed in jig time. The truth of the matter

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is there's been a wee bit of a misunderstanding."

"The truth of the matter is," said Rosie, "the Air Force arrived this afternoon and took it away with them for examination. You might find it at the Strategic Field." Then, because Ivan Smith looked so appallingly baffled and she was in such an ill humor, she added with caustic sarcasm, "I'm sure they'll give it to you if you ask for it politely."

Ivan Smith shuddered. He said, "If you can say that you just don't know them. Why, only last year they—" His voice trailed off in misery.

"I know one of them only too well." said Rosie. "He walked in a couple of hours ago and walked out with your precious briquette. By the way, Mr. Smith, just whom do *you* represent in this deal?"

"Let's just say I represent certain interested individuals in corporate industry," he replied.

And F. McCool, who had finished counting his shekels, and been sobered considerably thereby, tossed his daughter a warning look to keep her from pursuing that line of inquiry.

He said, "I'm sure we can work this out easily, Mr. Smith. Did you say your first name was Ivan?"

"That is correct." Ivan Smith bowed slightly from the waist. Then he began stuffing his money back into his overcoat pockets.

F. McCool looked like a wounded dog as he watched the million dollars vanishing. He cried, "Don't worry, Mr. Smith. The deal's still on."

"When you recover the briquette, Mr. Burns, I shall be glad to give you the money," said the stranger.

F. McCool said, "There's no reason why you shouldn't hang around while I take steps and plan our campaign, Ivan old man. We've a guest room—"

"I'm hardly an old man and I have no wish to hang," said Ivan, a trifle stiffly.

But he thawed just a little when F. McCool turned on his all-out charm. He even consented to sit down, but without going so far as to remove his money-laden overcoat. Rosie watched him closely, trying to make him out. She had never seen or heard of anyone exactly like him before. His accent was indefinable, his manners and understanding a blend of a half-dozen social and semantic codes.

Her father and the stranger were still at it, and she was still watching and listening when the evening invasion began. First it was the reporters and photographers who came charging in again, complaining that the phone was out of order, and did Rosie or her father in any way connect the fall of the meteorite with the reported landing of a flying saucer at almost the same time and hardly ten miles out of town, in the midst of the lonely wasteland known as Corner Swamp?

Ivan Smith said nothing.

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F. McCool said he didn't know for sure, but that a connection between the two events seemed probable.

Rosie asked, "Who saw the saucer?"

When she was told it was Jack Martin, a young man who made a precarious living trapping in the swamp, she said, "I've known Fibber Jack all my life. I've never heard him tell a whole-truth yet."

"But there has to be a first time for everything," F. McCool protested. "Why would he lie about a thing like that?"

Thereafter the press took over, and put words of their own choosing into the mouths of Rosie and her father. They even tried to get Ivan Smith to make a statement, but he remained remarkably close-mouthed. Then came more posing for pictures, after which the intruders departed in a body.

Next to arrive was a small group of Rosie's co-teachers at the high school, along with a deputation of favorite students.

Rosie managed them with no help at all from her father and Ivan Smith, who sat unhappily in a corner until they took their departure.

As soon as they were gone, F. McCool mopped a suddenly perspiring brow and said, "It's like Grand Central Station! A man can hardly hear himself think in this house."

Rosie correctly interpreted this remark as a prelude to a demand by her father of a change of venue —preferably to the Shamrock Tavern—and though she was in no mood to oppose him, she was not looking forward to being alone. Hence she was immeasurably relieved when, as he bent over the windowseat to pick up his hat, the doorbell rang and Jim Lawrence entered.

The young astro-physicist accepted introduction to Rosie's father warmly, but Ivan Smith he greeted coldly, as a potential if unlikely rival. Then he said, "I came back to tell you that we have the governor, Senator Philibert and the Princeton School of Graduate Research in our corner already. We're not going to stand for a repetition of last year's incident, when the Air Force commandeered that other meteor and burned it to ashes before anyone else could get a look at it. They're not going to get away with such high-handed conduct."

"You're right about that," said F. McCool, who disliked all professors since he had stubbornly refused in his youth a golden opportunity of going to college. "Mr. Smith and I are going to enlist some enormously wealthy financiers in this battle. In fact, we were just leaving." Before escorting Ivan Smith to the door, he turned to whisper to his daughter, "Are you sure you'll be quite safe alone with this strange young man?"

"Are you sure you'll be safe with Mr. Smith at the Shamrock Tavern, dad?" she countered,

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and got a black look as her father departed.

Jim Lawrence stared after them. Finally, he turned to Rosie and said, "There's something very odd about that Mr. Smith. I can't quite seem to put my finger on it, but I'm sure you must have noticed it too."

"Well," conceded Rosie, "he *is* different from the general run of people. For one thing, he's carrying a million dollars in cash on him. For another, he referred to that meteor, or whatever it was that hit me, as a briquette. And a briquette is fuel in the form of a brick, unless my dictionary has failed me after all these years."

"He said *what?*" Jim Lawrence leaned over, and gripped her shoulder excitedly. Then he flushed, and withdrew his hands quickly. "Forgive me," he said. "But I thought—Just what did he say?"

"You heard me, if you're not deaf," Rosie told him, aggrievedly.

"But I can't *believe* it," said Jim Lawrence. "After what happened last year when that other meteorite practically burned up an Air Force lab under heat tests—" His lips tightened. "I'll bet that's what the damned thing is. The big question is, how does Smith know it? I never heard of him, and he looks more like a mechanic than a scientist to me. Did you see the calluses on his hands?"

"I didn't notice,' said Rosie, her unreasonable resentment at Jim Lawrence's aggressive vehemence mounting apace. "I only know that he had a million dollars on him."

"Stop talking like an idiot," Jim Lawrence said. "Think, girl, *think!* If that stuff is fuel, it's of a kind unknown on Earth. I'm an expert in that field, and I know. And if it's not from Earth it must be extra-terrestrial—and that means *spaceships.*"

"I suppose," said Rosie loftily, "the next thing you'll be telling me is that it fell out of that flying saucer Fibber Jack Martin claims he saw land in Corner Swamp this afternoon." For good measure, she threw in, "You'll be asking me to believe that Ivan Smith came out of the saucer to buy it back. You couldn't even sell Wheat-Jets on TV with that one."

"It does sound crazy when you put it so baldly," he said with his slow grin. "But you've got to admit the whole sequence is odd—especially that Smith character and his million bucks. Ivan—that's John in Russia. So he calls himself John Smith. I hope his money is realer than his name."

All at once, Rosie discovered that she had endured all that she could stand. The emotional and physical strains of the day seemed, in retrospect, no longer tolerable. Usually a well-balanced girl, she burst into tears. "You all talk as if I were some sort of pawn in a game of chess," she sobbed. "You'd think I'd ceased to be a human being just because an Unidentified Flying Object fell on me . . ."

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"Good Lord! I'm sorry, Rosie. Really I am." All at once, Jim Lawrence was on the sofa, soothing her quite satisfactorily. He said, "I'm almost glad I helped make you unhappy. You look so lovely when you cry. Like a mist-storm gathering over an Irish lake."

"And what would you know about such things—you with a name like Lawrence?" Rosie demanded, sitting up suspiciously.

"My mother's name was Riley," he said. "And now shut up for a while and we'll both stop thinking about our troubles."

It was quite a bit later when the doorbell rang again but its ringing found Rosie and Jim still locked cozily together on the sofa. Jim answered it reluctantly and Rosie had barely time to smooth herself out when Colonel Willis entered, looking more like a thunderstorm than a mist-storm.

He said, "I understand, Miss Burns, that you've had an unidentified man here who offered you a large sum of cash for the UFO."

"Is this house under surveillance?" Rosie asked angrily.

"What do *you* think?" countered the colonel. "Where is he?"

"You must have grade-Z spies if you don't know," said Jim Lawrence, stepping quickly to Rosie's side and glaring at Willis.

"That's neither here nor there, but I don't mind telling you that our man was making a phone report to me when the unidentified visitor left with your father." The Colonel's voice was caustic. "What can you tell me about him?"

"Ask Jim. He met Mr. Smith," said Rosie. Then, when she saw trouble approaching at a gallop, she added, "His name is Ivan Smith and he wants to buy the UFO or whatever it is. He has a million dollars in cash on him. He and my father adjourned to talk it over where they wouldn't be disturbed."

"A million bucks?" Colonel Willis sounded almost human in his unexpected recourse to slang. "In cash?"

"That's right," said Rosie.

The colonel looked stunned. Finally, shaking his head, he muttered, "But that's insane . . ." He paused, then added in a distracted tone, "Or is it? Now at least you'll understand why I appropriated your UFO this afternoon. A man willing to pay a million in cash would hardly hesitate to kill. Why, this man Smith might be—"

"This man Smith might be anything," said Rosie firmly. "Why don't you talk to him yourself?"

"That's exactly what I intend to do," said Colonel Willis. He tossed in a Parthian shot by adding, "If he's with your father, Miss Burns, I think I know where to find him."

He marched out into the night.

Rosie and Jim's next interruption came from the telephone. Rosie, her hip increasingly stiff, hobbled into the hall to answer it. The caller was Haggerty, proprietor-barman of the Shamrock

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Tavern. Haggerty sounded as if he were talking under water, or at the very least, under great and abnormal emotional stress.

He said, "I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, Miss Rosie, but your father and his friend—" He hesitated.

"If they've been appropriated by the Air Force, I know all about it," said Rosie.

"Oh, the Air Force just left," said Haggerty. "It was the colonel with his questions who kept me from calling you sooner. I'm afraid it's far worse than that, Miss Rosie."

"What is it, Haggerty?" said Rosie, girding herself for some unimaginable horror.

Mournfully, the barman said, "Your father and his friend were flashing big money around, and Officer Leith happened to look at one of the bills. He ran them both in for passing counterfeit money. I promise you, Miss Rosie, I did my best to talk him out of it. But you know that thick-headed Scot."

"I know," said Rosie. "I'm sure you did, Haggerty. And thanks very much for letting me know."

V

Somehow, Rosie managed to get dressed. Except for the brief romantic passage with Jim Lawrence, her life had turned into a nightmare overday and she had no intention of sitting out a nightmare on the living room sofa.

Jim Lawrence helped her out to his car, and let her direct him to the local courthouse in the center of town that did double-duty as a police station.

En route, she said, "What kind of man would try to do what this Smith person has done? What kind of man, unless he were a lunatic, would think for a moment that he could get away with purchasing that briquette with counterfeit money?"

"A lunatic, maybe," countered Jim, "but where would he get a million dollars in bogus money? Forged currency isn't the easiest thing in the world to come by in carload lots, unless you're a counterfeiter. And counterfeiters don't like lunatics involved in their operations. In a crime setup any unbalanced person represents a considerable surplus risk."

"All right, darling," said Rosie, savoring the endearment on her tongue. "What other kind of man would try such a thing?"

"He might not even be a man by our standards," said Jim.

Rosie cried, "Oh, *no!* You're not suggesting again that Ivan Smith came out of a flying saucer? I refuse to believe it, even to think it."

"One of the basic tenets of science, honey," said Jim, "is that when something fails to conform to any known or familiar pattern we must search the unknown for a key to the mystery. I simply can't see your Mr. Smith fitting into any known human category. He's no scientist, that's for sure—and he's

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no businessman. If he were, he'd never have carelessly thrown around a million bucks in cash, bogus or real. And he's no enemy agent. Secret agents never operate so openly. I can't see him as a crook for the same reason. So what's left?"

"I gave up guessing games when I was ten," said Rosie. "So he came from the saucer Fibber Jack claims he saw this afternoon. That's *your* theory—and you still consider yourself a scientist? *Hah!*"

"Well, as Bruce Bairnsfather said, 'If you knows of a better 'ole, go to it.' Is that the courthouse ahead, honey?"

"That's the courthouse," said Rosie, taking a deep breath as she prepared herself for the battle that she knew was coming.

She noted that the activity surrounding the building was far greater than normal for a non-Saturday night and that there were at least a dozen official-looking cars, including Colonel Willis', parked in front. Conspicuous also were a number of men in Air Force uniforms.

Inside, her father was arguing with Judge Westcott and the Chief. "Your honor," he was protesting, "I'm an innocent man and you know it. On my hope of salvation, I swear I had no more suspicion that money was bogus than I'll have breath in my body when the life's gone out of it. I give you my solemn word that I never so much as dreamed it was—"

"Hi, Chief. Hi, Judge Westcott," said Rosie, deeming it time to interrupt F. McCool before he talked himself into more trouble. "What are the charges and what's the bail?"

The chief and the judge exchanged glances. Then Judge Westcott cleared his throat and said, "As a matter of fact, since Haggerty doesn't want to press charges and all the money's been turned in, there may not be any. Unless, of course, Colonel Willis asks us to hold your father. He's inside, talking to the other prisoner now."

Recalling the colonel's fondness for appropriation, Rosie began to worry. F. McCool noticed her for the first time and said, "It's Rosie herself. Could any man ask for a better, truer daughter, and could any father stand more unjustly accused?"

"If Colonel Willis lets him go, I'll take him home and see that he stays there the rest of the night," said Rosie. "I'm afraid he's had a pretty exciting day."

"As you must have had yourself, if half what I hear is true," said the judge. "Ah, here's the colonel now, with his prisoner."

Willis came out behind Ivan Smith. The colonel was wearing a frown of perplexity, and his voice trembled slightly as he said to Judge Westcott, "If your chief doesn't mind, we'd like to take this man in—along with the evidence, of course. There are a number of things that just don't jive."

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"What about the other prisoner?" the chief asked.

Rosie was getting ready to butt in when Colonel Willis flicked a glance at her, then said with the faintest flicker of an eyelid, "We have nothing against him at present. But if he doesn't report the next strange customer who tries to give him a million dollars, we'll have to take steps. Good night, gentlemen—and you, Miss Burns. You'll be hearing from me soon."

She let him get away with it. There was nothing else to do. Then Jim Lawrence drove her back to Innisfail Cottage, with a strangely subdued F. McCool sitting alone on the rear seat. He didn't speak until they had stopped in front of the cottage. Then he asked abruptly, "What sort of a man do you suppose Smith was anyway? How could he hope to fool *me* with a million dollars in counterfeit money?"

And Rosie replied tartly, "What sort of a man do *you* suppose he was? If he couldn't fool you you ought to be a wizard at reading character."

"Ay, I must be growing old," said F. McCool, getting out of the car. "Well, it's been a long, hard day. Young man, what are you doing to my daughter?"

"Don't be an idiot, dad," said Rosie. "He wouldn't be so public about it if his intentions weren't honorable. But he ought to realize it's too early for that yet. We have a little courting to do first."

It was ten minutes later when Jim drove away and a flushed and sparkling Rosie rejoined her father inside the cottage. He regarded her mournfully and said, "I can see you don't take after your mother, girl. She was never light in her affections."

"Who's light?" said Rosie, limping into the kitchen for a raid on the icebox before going to bed. She was smiling softly to herself when at last, to a rontomontage of F. McCool's rhythmic snores, she drifted off to sleep. At the moment, she didn't give a damn if she never saw the briquette again, or got a cent in cold cash for it. Jim was enough.

The next morning, she awoke early, as the newly-in-love so often do, to savor the delicious excitement that had come to her less than twenty-four hours previously. Her hip was no longer as stiff as it had been, and she hummed a happy tune as she prepared coffee, then poured herself a cup and went into the living room to drink it.

Thus she was right on the spot when Ivan Smith, without a sound, came straight through the living room wall. He did not notice her and began unloading packets of money from his overcoat pockets and laying them on a table. Rosie watched him in stunned silence, coffee cup and saucer poised, until the power of speech returned to her.

"How did you do that?" she asked weakly. For the wall through

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which Ivan Smith had entered was now as smooth and unblemished as it had ever been. Even the picture of Killarney Castle remained untipped in its green-and-gold frame.

Ivan Smith's usually pale face became crimson with embarrassment. He gulped, then said, "If I'd had the slightest idea you were here, I'd never have dreamed of *zompring* in—especially not in front of a lady. Oh dear!" and he began wringing his hands. "I'm so sorry."

"I'm just curious. I never saw anyone who could come through a wall except in a bad French movie. How do you do it?"

"We're not supposed to do it," said Ivan Smith piteously. "We get it trained out of us in infancy. It's really a terrible offence. If *zompring* were allowed on *Karpsb,* we'd have all sorts of crime—to say nothing of no privacy or security."

"I see what you mean," said Rosie faintly. "But why are you returning the money, when you know it's no good?"

He said, "I'm so sorry for that, too. But it's all I have with me to pay for the rhodomagnetic matrix I dropped on you."

"*You* dropped that thing on me?"

"I'm terribly sorry—and you're so *schrasslank,* too. I assure you it was an accident. But if I hadn't got it back, my ship would not have the power to return to *Karpsb.* You see," he added, coloring again, "I dropped our other rhodomagnetic matrix last year, Earth-time, and we didn't get it back. So I had to recover this one." He pulled the hitherto Unidentified Flying Object from his swollen pocket and showed it to her. "I hope the money turns out to be worth *something,*" he added. "I recovered all but a little of it from the laboratory."

"Say, wait a minute!" Rosie exclaimed, her addled wits reassembling themselves. "The last time I saw you, you were being taken to the Strategic Airfield stockade. The money had been confiscated and the what-is-it was already under lock and key."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "They made it very easy for me when they put us all so close together." He smiled, like a child that expects praise for his accomplishments. Then, abruptly, his face fell. "But I had to *zompr* to get the money and the matrix and get back here. And then you caught me at it."

"Never mind," said Rosie. "I think you've done splendidly. I forgive you. I'm sure I shan't *ever* forget you."

"You are *schrasslank!*" he told her. "But now I must return to the swamp, where my ship is landing to pick me up in two hours."

"So Fibber Jack *was* telling the truth about the flying saucer!" Rosie murmured. She put down her coffee, and hit the side of her face with the heel of her hand, three times hard. Then she said, "Hey, I can drive you there in ten minutes."

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"Thank you, but that's not permitted." Ivan looked sad. "If I were traced being driven there in an Earth vehicle, they wouldn't pick me up at all. And I fear I'm not conditioned properly to being marooned on Earth."

"You can say *that* again, buster," said Rosie. Then, "You poor man, or whatever you are. You must have walked all night."

He said, "Oh, no. I *zompred* into the back of a truck headed this way. As long as I wasn't being driven to the place of landing . . ."

"I understand," said Rosie, "or do I? At any rate, let me get you some coffee, Mr. Smith."

"I'm sorry," said Ivan, "but coffee really doesn't agree with me. No Earth food does. And I really must be on my way."

He walked out quite normally, through the door, bowed politely and was on his way.

Five minutes later, the telephone rang. It was Colonel Willis and he sounded strained and upset. He said, "Has Ivan Smith turned up at your house yet?"

"He just left," said Rosie truthfully. "He says they're coming in a flying saucer to pick him up."

Unexpectedly, the colonel asked, "Tell me honestly, Miss Burns. Do you believe him? I'm quite serious in asking."

"Yes, I believe him," said Rosie. "Why not?"

The noise the colonel emitted sounded strangely like a moan. He said, "That's not the question. The question is *why* do you believe him? Can you give me a good reason?"

"Well," said Rosie "for one thing, he *zompred* in."

"What's *that?*" asked the colonel suspiciously. "What did you say—*zompred?*"

"That's right," said Rosie. "He *zompred* right in through the living room wall."

This time there was no doubt about Colonel Willis moaning. He groaned. "So I *wasn't* seeing things when I went to interview Smith in his cell this morning. Miss Burns, I was so sure I was crazy I didn't even report the man missing. I waited till the regular guard did that fifteen minutes ago. Then, when I found out the money and the UFO were missing, too, I had to call you and find out if I was sane."

"Don't doubt it for a moment," said Rosie. "Ivan *zompred,* all right. He was quite ashamed of having done it. It seems *zompring* is simply not done on his home planet. By the way, he added he also dropped that UFO that hit the woman last fall. He called it a rhodomagnetic matrix and said he had to get it back or his flying saucer couldn't go back to *Karpsb* for lack of fuel. *Karpsb* is his home planet."

"Thanks very much, Miss Burns. You've cleared up a lot of things," said Colonel Willis graciously.

"Have I?" said Rosie, feeling quite flattered.

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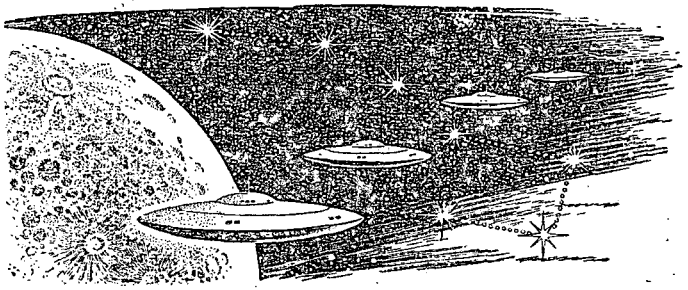
"You have. One thing more. He didn't tell you where his pals were picking him up, did he?"

"No, he said he couldn't do that," lied Rosie. She had no intention of giving poor Mr. Smith away, after he'd been so polite. She added, "I really must hang up now. My father's howling for his coffee."

"Having heard him howl last night," said Willis, "I can appreciate that. By the way, better put that counterfeit money in a bank vault as soon as you can. We've tested it, and it seems to be some form of sheet platinum. It's worth a tidy sum in such bulk."

"Thank you, Colonel, I'll do that very thing."

She hung up and got busy. If F. McCool ever found the money, he'd drink himself to death in a year. She'd have to get it into the car if she were going to drive out close to Corner Swamp to see the saucer and get back in time for her date with Jim Lawrence. It looked like a busy Saturday all around.



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a surface raid

by . . . Philip K. Dick

From deep underground they mocked man's destiny—far from the great sun and the stars of heaven. Horribly cruel were their weapons.

HARL LEFT the third level, catching a tube car going North. The tube car carried him swiftly through one of the big junction bubbles and down to the fifth level. Harl caught an exciting, fugitive glimpse of people and outlets, a complex tangle of mid-period business and milling confusion.

Then the bubble was behind him and he was nearing his destination, the vast industrial fifth level, sprawling below everything else like some gigantic, soot-encrusted octopus of the night's misrule.

The gleaming tube car ejected him and continued on its way, disappearing down the tube. Harl bounded agilely into the receiving strip and slowed to a stop, still on his feet, swaying expertly back and forth.

A few minutes later he reached the entrance to his father's office. Harl raised his hand and the code door slid back. He entered, his heart thumping with excitement. The time had come.

Edward Boynton was in the planning department studying the outline for a new robot bore when he was informed that his son had entered the main office.

Philip K. Dick has a challenging capacity for combining the most exciting aspects of his previous stories with variations that sweep the chess-board clean, and rearrange it in the most startling fashion. His PLANET FOR TRANSIENTS *dealt with the aftermath of atomic warfare,* SOUVENIR *with a conflict of cultures. His newest story links the one to the other, unforgettably.*

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"I'll be right back," Boynton said, making his way past his policy staff and up the ramp into the office.

"Hello, dad," Harl exclaimed squaring his shoulders. Father and son exchanged handclasps. Then Harl sat down slowly. "How are things?" he asked. "I guess you expected me."

Then Edward Boynton seated himself behind his desk. "What do you want here?" he demanded. "You know I'm busy."

Harl smiled thinly across at his father. In his brown industrial-planner uniform, Edward Boynton towered above his young son, a massive man with broad shoulders and thick blond hair. His blue eyes were cold and hard as he returned the young man's level gaze.

"I happened to come into some information." Harl glanced uneasily around the room. "Your office isn't tapped, is it?"

"Of course not," the elder Boynton assured him.

"No screens or ears?" Harl relaxed a little. "I've learned that you and several others from your department are going up to the surface soon." Harl leaned eagerly toward his father. "Up to the surface—on a raid for saps."

Ed Boynton's face darkened. "Where did you hear that?" He gazed intently at his son. "Did anyone in this department—"

"No," Harl said quickly. "No one informed. I picked up the information on my own, in connection with my educational activities."

Ed Boynton began to understand. "I see. You were experimenting with channel taps, cutting across the confidential channels. Like they teach you to do in communications."

"That's right. I happened to pick up a conversation between you and Robin Turner concerning the raid."

The atmosphere in the room became easier, more friendly. Ed Boynton relaxed, settling back in his chair. "Go on," he urged.

"It was mere chance. I had cut across ten or twelve channels, holding each one for only a second. I was using the Youth League equipment. All at once I recognized your voice. So I stayed on and caught the whole conversation."

"Then you heard most of it."

Harl nodded. "Exactly when are you going up, dad? Have you set an exact date?"

Ed Boynton frowned. "No," he said, "I haven't. But it will be sometime this week. Almost everything is arranged."

"How many are going?" Harl asked.

"We're taking up one mother ship and about thirty eggs. All from this department."

"Thirty eggs? Sixty or seventy men."

"That's right." Ed Boynton stared intently at his son. "It won't be a big raid. Nothing compared

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to some of the Directorate raids of the past few years."

"But big enough for a single department."

Ed Boynton's eyes flickered. "Be careful, Harl. If such loose talk should get out—"

"I know. I cut the recorder off as soon as I picked up the drift of your talk. I know what would happen if the Directorate found out a department was raiding without authorization—for its own factories."

"Do you really know? I wonder."

"One mother ship and thirty eggs," Harl exclaimed, ignoring the remark. "You'll be on the surface for about forty hours?"

"About. It depends on what luck we have."

"How many saps are you after?"

"We need at least two dozen," the elder Boynton replied.

"Males?"

"For the most part. A few females, but males primarily."

"For the basic-industry factory units, I assume." Harl straightened in his chair. "All right, then. Now that I know more about the raid itself I can get down to business."

He stared hard at his father.

"Business?" Boynton glanced up sharply. "Precisely what do you mean?"

"My exact reason for coming down here." Harl leaned across the desk toward his father, his voice clipped and intense. "I'm going along with you on the raid. I want to go along—to get some saps for myself."

For a moment there was an astonished silence. Then Ed Boynton laughed. "What are you talking about? What do *you* know about saps?"

The inner door slid back, and Robin Turner came quickly into the office. He joined Boynton behind the desk.

"He can't go," Turner said flatly. "It would increase the risks tenfold."

Harl glanced up. "There *was* an ear in here, then."

"Of course. Turner always listens in." Ed Boynton nodded, regarding his son thoughtfully. "Why do you want to go along?"

"That's my concern," Harl said, his lips tightening.

Turner rasped: "Emotional immaturity. A sub-rational adolescent craving for adventure and excitement. There's still a few like him who can't throw the old brain completely off. After two hundred years you'd think—"

"Is that it?" Boynton demanded. "You have some non-adult desire to go up and see the surface?"

"Perhaps," Harl admitted, flushing a little.

"You can't come," Ed Boynton stated emphatically. "It's far too dangerous. We're not going up there for romantic adventure. It's a job—a grim, hard, exacting job. The saps are getting wary. It's becoming more and more difficult to bring back a full load. We can't

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spare any of our eggs for whatever romantic foolishness—"

"I know it's getting hard," Harl interrupted. "You don't have to convince me that it's almost impossible to round up a whole load." Harl looked up defiantly at Turner and his father. He chose his words carefully. "And I know that's why the Directorate considers private raids a major crime against the State."

Silence.

Finally Ed Boynton sighed, a reluctant admiration in his stare. He looked his son slowly up and down. "Okay, Harl," he said. "You win."

Turner said nothing. His face was hard.

Harl got quickly to his feet. "Then it's all settled. I'll return to my quarters and get prepared. As soon as you're ready to go, notify me at once. I'll join you at the launching stage on the first level."

The elder Boynton shook his head. "We're not leaving from the first level. It would be too risky." His voice was heavy. "There are too many Directorate guards prowling around. We have the ship down here at fifth level, in one of the warehouses."

"Where shall I meet you, then?"

Ed Boynton stood up slowly. "We'll notify you, Harl. It will be soon, I promise you. In a couple of periods, at the most. Be at your vocational quarters."

"The surface is completely cool, isn't it?" Harl asked. "There aren't any radioactive areas left?"

"It's been cool for fifty years," his father assured him.

"Then I won't have to worry about a radiation shield." Harl said. "One thing more, dad. What language will we have to use? Can we speak our regular—"

Ed Boynton shook his head. "No. The saps never mastered any of the rational semantic systems. We'll have to revert to the old traditional forms."

Harl's face fell. "I don't know any of the traditional forms. They're not being taught anymore."

Ed Boynton shrugged. "It doesn't matter."

"How about their defenses? What sort of weapons should I bring? Will a screen and blast rifle be sufficient?"

"Only the screen is of vital importance," the elder Boynton said. "When the saps see us they scatter in all directions. One look at us and off they go."

"Fine," Harl said. "I'll have my screen checked over." He moved toward the door. "I'll go back up to the third level. I'll be expecting your signal. I'll have my equipment ready."

"All right," Ed Boynton said.

The two men watched the door slide shut after the youth.

"Quite a boy," Turner muttered.

"Turning out to be something, after all," Ed Boynton murmured. "He'll go a long way." He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "But I won-

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der how he'll act up on the surface during the raid."

Harl met with his group leader on the third level, an hour after he left his father's office.

"Then it's all settled?" Fashold asked, looking up from his report spools.

"All settled. They're going to signal me as soon as the ship is ready."

"By the way." Fashold put down his spools, pushing the scanner back. "I've learned something about the saps. As a YL leader I have access to the Directorate files. I've learned something virtually no one else knows."

"What is it?" asked Harl.

"Harl, the saps are related to us. They're a different species, but they're very closely related to us."

"Go on," Harl urged.

"At one time there was only the one species—the saps. Their full name is *homo sapiens*. We grew out of them, developed from them. We're biogenetic mutants. The change occurred during the third World War, two and a half centuries ago. Up to that time there had never been any *technos*."

"*Technos?*"

Fashold smiled. "That's what they called us at first. When they thought of us only as a separate class, and not as a distinct race. *Technos*. That was their name for *us*. That was how they always referred to us."

"But why? It's a strange name. Why *technos*, Fashold?"

"Because the first mutants appeared among the technocratic classes and gradually spread throughout all other educated classes. They appeared among scientists, scholars, field workers, trained groups, all the various specialized classes."

"And the saps didn't realize—"

"They thought of us only as a class, as I've just told you. That was during the Third World War and after. It was during the Final War that we fully emerged as recognizably and profoundly different. It became evident that we weren't just another specialized offshoot of *homo sapiens*. Not just another class of men more educated than the rest, with higher intellectual capacities."

Fashold gazed off into the distance. "During the Final War we emerged and showed ourselves for what we really were—a superior species supplanting *homo sapiens* in the same way that *homo sapiens* had supplanted Neanderthal man."

Harl considered what Fashold had said. "I didn't realize we were so closely related to them. I had no idea we had emerged so lately."

Fashold nodded. "It was only two centuries ago, during the war that ravaged the surface of the planet. Most of us were working down in the big underground laboratories and factories under the different mountain ranges—the Urals, the Alps, and the Rockies. We were down underground, under miles of rock and dirt and clay.

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And on the surface *homo sapiens* slugged it out with the weapons we designed."

"I'm beginning to understand. We designed the weapons for them to fight the war. They used our weapons without realizing—"

"We designed them and the saps used them to destroy themselves," Fashold interjected. "It was Nature's crucible, the elimination of one species and the emergence of another. We gave them the weapons and they destroyed themselves. When the war ended the surface was fused, and nothing but ash and hydroglass and radioactive clouds remained.

"We sent out scouting parties from our underground labs and found nothing but a silent, barren waste. It had been accomplished. They were gone, wiped out. And we had come to take their place."

"Not all of them could have been wiped out," Harl pointed out. "There are still a lot of them up there on the surface."

"True," Fashold admitted. "Some survived. Scattered remnants here and there. Gradually, as the surface cooled, they began to reform again, getting together and building little villages and huts. Yes, and even clearing some of the land—planting and growing things. But they're still remnants, Harl—remnants of a dying race now almost extinct, as the Neanderthaler is extinct."

"So nothing exists now but males and females without homes."

"There are a few villages here and there—wherever they've managed to clear the surface. But they've descended to utter savagery, and live like animals, wearing skins and hunting with rocks and spears. They've become almost bestial remnants who offer no organized resistance when we go up to raid a few of their villages for our factories."

"Then we—" Harl broke off abruptly as a faint bell sounded. He turned in startled apprehension, snapping on the vidphone.

His father's face formed on the screen, hard and stern. "Okay, Harl," he said. "We're ready."

"So soon? But—"

"We set the time ahead. Come down to my office." The image on the screen dimmed and vanished.

Harl did not move.

"They must have got worried," Fashold said, grinning. "They were apparently afraid you'd pass the information along."

"I'm all ready," Harl said. He picked up his blast gun from the table. "How do I look?"

In his silver communications uniform Harl looked splendid and impressive. He had put on heavy military boots and gloves. In one hand he gripped his blast gun. Around his waist was his screen control-belt.

"What's that?" Fashold asked, as Harl lowered black goggles over his eyes.

"These? Oh, they're for the sun."

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"Of course— The sun. I forgot."

Harl cradled his gun, balancing it expertly. "The sun would blind me. The goggles protect my eyes. I'll be safe up there, with my screen and gun, and these goggles."

"I hope so." Still grinning, Fashold thumped him on the back as he moved toward the door. "Bring back a lot of saps. Do a good job—and don't forget to include a female!"

THE MOTHER SHIP moved slowly from the warehouse, and out onto the lift stage, a rotund black teardrop emerging from storage. Its port locks slid back, and ramps climbed to meet the locks. Immediately supplies and equipment were on their way up, rising into the bowels of the ship.

"Almost ready," Turner said, his face twitching with nervousness as he gazed through the observation windows at the loading ramps outside. "I hope nothing goes wrong. If the Directorate should find out—"

"Quit worrying!" Ed Boynton ordered. "You picked the wrong time to let your thalamic impulses take over control."

"Sorry." Turner tightened his lips and moved away from the windows. The lift stage was ready to rise.

"Let's get started," Boynton urged. "Have you men from the department at each level?"

"Nobody but department members will be near the stage," Turner replied.

"Where is the balance of the crew?" Boynton demanded.

"At the first level. I sent them up during the day."

"Very well." Boynton gave the signal, and the stage under the ship began slowly to rise, lifting them steadily toward the level above.

Harl peered out the observation windows, watching the fifth level drop below and the fourth level, the vast commercial center of the under-surface system, come into view.

"Won't be long," Ed Boynton said, as the fourth level glided past. "So far so good."

"Where will we finally emerge?" Harl asked.

"In the latter stages of the war our various underground structures were connected by tunnels. That original network formed the basis of our present system. We'll emerge at one of the original entrances, located in the mountain range called 'The Alps.'"

"The Alps," Harl murmured.

"Yes, in Europe. We have maps of the surface, showing locations of sap villages in that region. A whole cluster of villages lie to the North and North East in what used to be Denmark and Germany. We've never raided there before. The saps have managed to clear the slag away from several thousand acres in that region, and seem gradually to be reclaiming most of Europe."

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"But why, dad," Harl asked.

Ed Boynton shrugged. "I don't know. They don't seem to have set themselves any organized objective. They show no signs at all, in fact, of emerging from their savage state. All their traditions were lost—books and records, inventions, and techniques. If you ask me—" He broke off abruptly. "Here comes the third level. We're almost there."

The huge mother ship roared slowly along, gliding above the surface of the planet. Harl peered out, awed by what he saw below.

Across the surface of the earth lay a crust of slag, an endless coating of blackened rock. The mineral deposit was unbroken except for occasional hills sharply jutting up, ash-covered, and with a few sparse bushes growing near their tops. Great sheets of sun-darkening ash drifted across the sky, but nothing living stirred. The surface of the earth was dead and barren, without sign of life.

"Is it all like that?" Harl asked.

Ed Boynton shook his head. "Not all. The saps have reclaimed some of the land." He gripped his son's arm and pointed. "See off that way? They've done quite a bit of clearing up there."

"Just how do they clear the slag?" Harl asked.

"It's hard," his father replied. "Fused, like volcanic glass—hydroglass—from the hydrogen bombs. They pick it away bit by bit, year after year. With their hands, with rocks, and with axes made from the glass itself."

"Why don't they develop better tools?"

Ed Boynton grinned wryly. "You know the answer to that. *We* made most of their tools for them, their tools and weapons and inventions, for hundreds of years."

"Here we go," Turner said "We're landing."

The ship settled down, coming to rest on the surface of the slag. For a moment the blackened rock rumbled under them. Then there was silence.

"We're down," Turner said.

Ed Boynton studied the surface map, sending it darting through the scanner. "We'll send out ten eggs as a starter. If we don't have much luck here we'll take the ship farther North. But we should do well. This area has never been raided before."

"How will the eggs cover?" Turner asked.

"The eggs will fan out in a spectrum, giving each egg a separate area. Our egg will move over toward the right. If we have any success, we'll return to the ship at once. Otherwise, we'll stay out until nightfall."

"Nightfall?" Harl asked.

Ed Boynton smiled. "Until dark. Until this side of the planet is turned away from the sun."

"Let's go," Turner said impatiently.

The port locks opened. The first eggs scooted out onto the slag, their

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treads digging into the slippery surface. One by one they emerged from the black hull of the mother ship, tiny spheres with their backs tapering into jet tubes, and their noses blunted into control turrets. They roared off across the slag and disappeared.

"Ours, next," Ed Boynton said.

Harl nodded and gripped his blast rifle tightly. He lowered his protection goggles over his eyes, and Turner and Boynton did the same. They entered their egg, Boynton seating himself behind the controls.

A moment later they shot out of the ship onto the smooth surface of the planet.

Harl peered out. He could see nothing but slag on all sides. Slag and drifting clouds of ash.

"It's dismal," he murmured. "Even with the goggles the sun burns my eyes."

"Don't look at it then," Ed Boynton cautioned. "Look away from it."

"I can't help it. It's so—so strange."

Ed Boynton grunted and increased the egg's speed. Far ahead of them something was coming into view. He headed the egg toward it.

"What's that?" Turner asked, alarmed.

"Trees," Boynton said, reassuringly. "Trees growing up in a clump. It marks the end of the slag. Then there's ash for awhile, and finally fields the saps have planted."

Boynton drove the egg to the edge of the slag area. He stopped it where the slag ended and the clump of trees began, snapping off the jets and locking the treads. He and Harl and Turner got out cautiously, their guns ready.

Nothing stirred. There was only silence, and the endless surface of slag. Between drifting clouds of ash the sky was a pale robin's-egg blue, and a few moisture clouds drifted with the ash. The air smelled good. It was thin and crisp, and the sun shed a friendly warmth.

"Put your screens on," Ed Boynton warned. As he spoke he snapped the switch at his belt and his own screen hummed, flashing on around him. Swiftly, Boynton's figure dimmed, wavering and fading. It winked out—and was gone.

Turner quickly followed suit. "Okay," his voice came, from a glimmering oval to Harl's right. "You next."

Harl turned on his screen. For an instant a strange cold fire enveloped him from head to foot, bathing him in sparks. Then his body too dimmed and vanished. The screens were functioning perfectly.

In Harl's ears a faint clicking sounded, warning him of the presence of the two others. "I can hear you," Harl said. "Your screens are in my earphones."

"Don't wander off," Ed Boynton cautioned. "Keep by us and listen for the clicks. It's dangerous to be separated, up here on the surface."

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Harl advanced carefully. The other two were on his right, a few yards off. They were crossing a dry yellow field overgrown with some kind of plant. The plants had long stalks that broke and crunched underfoot. Behind Harl was a trail of broken vegetation. He could clearly see the similar trails which Turner and his father were leaving.

But now it became necessary for him to separate from Turner and his father. Ahead of Harl the outline of a sap village rose up, its huts fashioned from some kind of plant fibre piled in heaps on top of wooden frames. He could see the shadowy outlines of animals tied to the huts. Trees and plants encircled the village, and he could distinguish the moving forms of people, and hear their voices.

People—saps. His heart beat quickly. With luck he might capture and bring back three or four for the Youth League. He felt suddenly confident and unafraid. Surely it would not be difficult. Planted fields, tied-up animals, rickety huts leaning and tilting—

The smell of dung commingling with the heat of the late afternoon became almost intolerable as Harl advanced. Cries, and other sounds of feverish human activity, drifted to him. The ground was flat and dry, and weeds and plants grew up everywhere. He left the yellow field and came onto a narrow footpath, littered with human refuse and animal dung.

And just beyond the road was the village.

The clicks had diminished in his earphones. Now they died out completely. Harl grinned to himself. He had moved away from Turner and Boynton, and was no longer in contact with them. They had no idea where he was.

He turned to the left, circling cautiously around the edge of the village. He passed by a hut, then several in a cluster. Around him green trees and plants grew in great clumps, and directly ahead of him gleamed a narrow stream with sloping, moss-covered banks.

A dozen people were washing at the edge of the stream, the children leaping into the water and scrambling up on the bank.

Harl halted, gazing at them in astonishment. Their skins were dark, almost black. A shiny, coppery black it was—a rich bronze mixed in with the dirt-color. *Was* it dirt?

He suddenly realized that the bathers had been burned black by the constant sun. The hydrogen explosions had thinned the atmosphere, searing off most of the layer of moisture clouds and for two hundred years the sun had beat mercilessly down on them—in sharp contrast to his own race. Undersurface, there was no ultraviolet light to burn the skin, or to raise the pigment level. He and the other *technos* had lost their skin color. There was no need for it in their subterranean world.

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But the bathers were incredibly dark, a rich reddish-black color. And they had nothing on at all. They were leaping and jumping eagerly about, splashing through the water and sunning themselves on the bank.

Harl watched them for a time. Children and three or four scrawny, elderly females. Would they do? He shook his head, and warily encircled the stream.

He continued on back among the huts, walking slowly and carefully, gazing alertly around with his gun held ready.

A faint breeze blew against him, rustling through the trees to his right. The sounds of the bathing children mixed with the dung smell, the wind, and the swaying of the trees.

Harl advanced cautiously. He was invisible, but he knew that he might at any moment be discovered and tracked down by his footprints or the sounds he might make. And if someone ran against him—

He stealthily darted past a hut, and emerged into an open place, a flat area of beaten earth. In the shade of the hut a dog lay sleeping with flies crawling over its lean flanks. An old woman was sitting on the porch of the rude dwelling, combing her long gray hair with a bone comb.

Harl passed by her cautiously. In the center of the open place a group of young men were standing. They were gesturing and talking together. Some were cleaning their weapons, long spears and knives of an inconceivable primitiveness. On the ground lay a dead animal, a huge beast with long, gleaming tusks and a thick hide. Blood oozed from its mouth—thick, dark blood. One of the young men turned suddenly—and kicked it with his foot.

Harl came up to the young men, and stopped. They were dressed in cloth clothing, long leg garments and shirts. Their feet were bare on top, for they wore loosely-woven vegetable-fibre sandals instead of shoes. They were clean-shaven, but their skin gleamed almost ebony black. Their sleeves were rolled up, exposing bulging, glistening muscles, dripping with sweat in the hot sun.

Harl could not understand what they were saying, but he was sure they were speaking one of the archaic traditional tongues.

He passed on. At the other side of the open place a group of old men were sitting cross-legged in a circle, weaving rough cloth on crude frames. Harl watched them in silence for a time. Their chatter drifted noisily up to him. Each old man was bent intently over his frame, his eyes glued on his work.

Beyond the row of huts some younger men and women were plowing a field, dragging the plow by ropes securely attached to their waists and shoulders.

Harl wandered on, fascinated. Everyone was engaged in some kind of activity—except the dog asleep under the hut. The young men with

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their spears, the old woman in front of the hut combing her hair, and weaving.

In one corner a huge woman was teaching a child what appeared to be an adding and subtracting game, using small sticks in lieu of figures. Two men were removing the hide from a small furred animal, stripping the pelt off carefully.

Harl passed a wall of hides, all hung up carefully to dry. The dull stench irritated his nostrils, making him want to sneeze. He passed a group of children pounding grain in a hollowed-out stone, beating the grain into meal. None of them looked up as he passed.

Some animals were tied together in a bunch. Some lay in the shade, big beasts with huge udders. They watched him silently.

Harl came to the edge of the village and stopped. From that point onward deserted fields stretched out. For perhaps a mile beyond the fields were trees and bushes, and beyond that the endless miles of slag.

He turned and walked back. Off to one side, sitting in the shade, a young man was chipping away at a block of hydroslag, cutting it carefully with a few rough tools. He seemed to be fashioning a weapon. Harl watched him, watched the endless, solemn blows descending again and again. The slag was hard. It was a long tedious job.

He walked on. A group of women were mending broken arrows. Their chatter followed him for a time, and he found himself wishing he could understand it. Everyone was busy, working rapidly. Dark, shiny arms rose and fell, and the chattering murmur of voices drifted back and forth.

Activity. Laughter. A child's laughter echoed suddenly through the village, and a few heads turned. Harl bent down, intently studying a man's head at close range.

A strong face he had. His twisted knotted hair was short, and his teeth were even and white. On his arms were copper bracelets, almost matching the rich bronze hue of his skin. His bare chest was marked with tattoos, etched into his flesh with brightly colored pigments.

Harl wandered back the way he had come. He passed the old woman on the porch, and paused again to observe her. She had stopped combing her hair. Now she was fixing a child's hair, braiding it skillfully back into an elaborate pattern. Harl watched her, fascinated. The pattern was intricate, complex, and the task took a long time. The old woman's faded eyes were intent on the child's hair, on the detailed work. Her withered hands flew.

Harl walked on, moving toward the stream. He passed the bathing children again. They had all climbed out on the bank and were drying themselves in the sun. So these were the *saps*. The race that was dying out—the dying race, soon to be extinct. Remnants.

But they did not appear to be a

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dying race. They were working hard, tirelessly chipping at the hydroslag, fixing their arrows, hunting, plowing, pounding grain, weaving, combing—

He stopped suddenly, rigid, his blast gun at his shoulder. Ahead of him, through the trees by the stream, something moved. Then he heard two voices—a man's voice and a woman's voice, raised in excited conversation.

Harl advanced cautiously. He pushed past a flowering bush, and peered into the gloom between the trees.

A man and woman were sitting at the edge of the water, in the dark shadow of the trees. The man was making bowls, shaping them out of wet clay scooped up from the water. His fingers flew, expertly, rapidly. He spun the bowls, turning them on a revolving platform between his knees.

As the man finished the bowls the woman took them and painted them with deft, vigorous strokes of a crude brush gleaming with red pigment.

The woman was beautiful. Harl gazed down at her in stunned admiration. She sat almost motionless, resting against a tree, holding each bowl securely as she painted it. Her black hair hung down to her waist, falling across her shoulders and back. Her features were finely cut, each line clear and vivid, her dark eyes immense. She studied each bowl intently, her lips moving a little and Harl noticed that her hands were small and delicately fashioned.

He walked over toward her, moving carefully. The woman did not hear him or look up. In growing wonder he realized that her coppery body was small and beautifully formed, her limbs slender and supple. She did not seem to be aware of him.

Suddenly the man spoke again. The woman glanced up, lowering the bowl to the ground. She rested a minute, cleaning her brush with a leaf. She wore rough leg garments, reaching down to her knees, and tied at her waist with a twisted flaxen rope. She wore no other garment. Her feet and shoulders were bare, and in the afternoon sun her bosom rose and fell quickly as she breathed.

The man said something else. After a moment the woman picked up another bowl and began to paint again. The two of them worked rapidly, silently, both intent on their work.

Harl studied the bowls. They were all of similar design. The man made them rapidly, building them up from coils of clay, and then snaking the coils around and around, higher and higher. He slapped water against the clay, rubbing the surface smooth and firm. Finally he laid them out in rows, to dry in the sun.

The woman selected the bowls that were dry and then painted them.

Harl watched her. He studied her

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a long time the way she moved her coppery body, the intense expression on her face, the faint movement of her lips and chin. Her fingers were slender and exquisitely tapered. Her nails were long, coming finally to a point. She held each bowl carefully, turning it with expert care, painting her design with rapid strokes.

He watched her closely. She was painting the same design on each bowl, painting it again and again. A bird, and then a tree. A line that appeared to represent the ground. A cloud suspended directly above it.

What was the precise significance of that recurrent motif? Harl bent closer, peering intently. Was it really the same? He watched the skillful motion of her hands as she took bowl after bowl, starting the design again and again. The design was basically the same—but each time she made it a little different. No two bowls came out exactly alike.

He was both puzzled, and fascinated. It was the same design, but altered slightly each time. The color of the bird would be altered—or the length of its plume. Less frequently the position of the tree, or the cloud. Once she painted two tiny clouds hovering above the ground. Sometimes she put grass and the outline of hills in the background.

Suddenly the man got to his feet, wiping his hands on his cloth. He spoke to the girl and then hurried off, threading his way through the bushes until he was lost to view.

Harl glanced around excitedly. The girl went right on painting rapidly, calmly. The man had disappeared and the girl remained alone, painting quietly by herself.

Harl was caught in the grip of conflicting and almost overpowering emotions. He wanted to speak to the girl, to ask her about her painting, her design. He wanted to ask her why she changed it each time.

He wanted to sit down and talk to her. To speak to her and hear her talk to him. It was strange. He didn't understand it himself. His vision swam, twisting and blurring, and sweat dripped from his neck and stooping shoulders. The girl continued to paint. She did not look up, or suspect that he was standing directly in front of her. Harl's hand flew to his belt. He took a deep breath, hesitating. Dared he? Should he? The man would be back—

Harl pressed the stud on his belt. Around him his screen hissed, and sparked.

The girl glanced up, startled. Her eyes widened in swift horror.

She screamed.

Harl stepped quickly back, gripping his gun, appalled by what he had done.

The girl scrambled to her feet, sending bowls and paints flying. She gazed at him, her eyes still wide, her mouth open. Slowly she backed away toward the bushes.

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Then abruptly she turned and fled, crashing through the shrubbery, screaming and shrieking.

Harl straightened in sudden fear. Quickly, he restored his screen. The village was alive with growing sound. He could hear voices raised in excited panic, and the sound of people running, crashing through the bushes—the entire village erupting in a torrent of excited activity.

Harl made his way quickly down the stream, past the bushes and out into the open.

Suddenly he stopped, his heart pounding furiously. A crowd of *saps* was hurrying toward the stream—men with spears, old women, and shrieking children. At the edge of the bushes they stopped, staring and listening, their faces frozen in a strange, intent expression. Then they were advancing into the bushes, furiously pushing the branches out of the way—*searching for him.*

Abruptly his earphones clicked.

"Harl!" Ed Boynton's voice came clear and sharp. "Harl, lad!"

Harl jumped, then cried out in desperate gratefulness. "Dad, I'm here."

Ed Boynton gripped his arm, yanking him off balance. "What's the matter with you? Where did you go? What did you do?"

"You got him?" Turner's voice broke in. "Come on then—both of you! We have to get out of here, fast. They're scattering white powder everywhere."

Saps were rushing around, throwing the powder into the air in great clouds. It drifted through the air, settling down over everything. It appeared to be a kind of pulverized chalk. Other saps were sprinkling oil from big jars and shouting in high-pitched excitement.

"We better get out," Boynton agreed grimly. "We don't want to tangle with them when they're aroused."

Harl hesitated. "But—"

"Come on!" His father urged, tugging at his arm. "Let's go. We haven't a moment to lose."

Harl gazed back. He could not see the woman, but saps were running everywhere, throwing their sheets of chalk and sprinkling the oil. Saps with iron-tipped spears advanced ominously, kicking at the weeds and bushes as they circled about.

Harl allowed himself to be led by his father. His mind whirled. The woman was gone, and he was sure that he would never see her again. When he had made himself visible she had screamed, and run off.

Why? It didn't make sense. Why had she recoiled from him in blind terror? What had he done?

And what did it matter to him whether he saw her again or not? Why was she important? He did not understand. He did not understand *himself.* There was no rational explanation for what had happened. It was totally incomprehensible.

Harl followed his father and

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Turner back to the egg, still bewildered and wretched, still trying to understand, to grasp the meaning of what had happened between him and the woman. It did not make sense. He had gone out of his mind and then she had gone out of *her* mind. There had to be some meaning to it—if he could only grasp it.

At the egg Ed Boynton halted, glancing back. "We were lucky to get away," he said to Harl, shaking his head. "When they're aroused they're like beasts. They're animals, Harl. That's what they are. Savage animals."

"Come on," Turner said impatiently. "Let's get out of here—while we still can walk."

JULIE CONTINUED to shudder even after she had been carefully bathed and purified in the stream and rubbed down with oil by one of the older women.

She sat in a heap, her arms wrapped around her knees, shaking and trembling uncontrollably. Ken, her brother, stood beside her, grim-faced, his hand on her bare, coppery shoulder.

"What was it?" Julie murmured. "What was it?" She shuddered. "It was—horrible. It revolted me, made me ill, just to look at it."

"What did it look like?" Ken demanded.

"It was—it was like a man. But it couldn't have been a man. It was metallic all over, from head to foot, and it had huge hands and feet. Its face was all pasty white like—like meal. It was—sickly. Hideously sickly. White and metallic, and sickly. Like some kind of root dug up out of the soil."

Ken turned to the old man sitting behind him, who was listening intently. "What was it?" he demanded. "What was it, Mr. Stebbins? You know about such things. What did she see?"

Mr. Stebbins got slowly to his feet. "You say it had white skin? Pasty? Like dough? And huge hands and feet?"

Julie nodded. "And—and something else."

"What?"

"It was *blind*. It had something instead of eyes. Two black spaces. Darkness." She shuddered and stared toward the stream.

Suddenly Mr. Stebbins tensed, his jaw hardening. He nodded. "I know," he said. "I know what it was."

"What was it?"

Mr. Stebbins muttered to himself, frowning. "It's not possible. But your description—" He stared off in the distance, his brow wrinkled. "They live underground," he said finally, "under the surface. They emerge from the mountains. They live in the earth, in great tunnels and chambers they have hewn out for themselves. They are not men. They look like men, but they are not. They live under the ground and dig the metal from the earth. They dig and horde the metal. They seldom come up to the surface. They cannot look at the sun."

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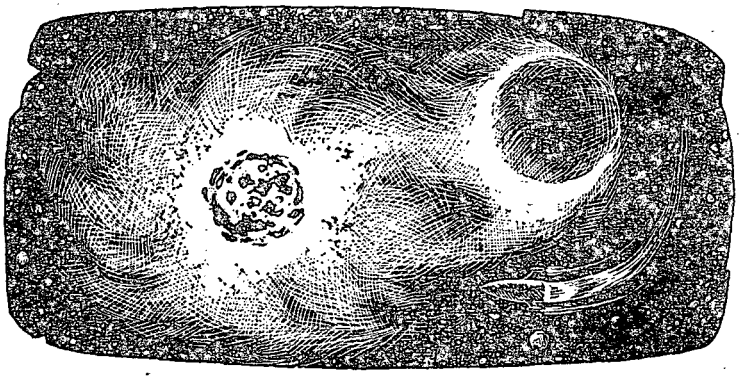
"What are they called?" Julie asked.

Mr. Stebbins searched his mind, thinking back through the years. Back to the old books and legends he had heard. Things that lived under the ground . . . Like men but not men . . . Things that dug tunnels, that mined metals . . . Things that were blind and had great hands and feet and pasty-white skin.

"Goblins," Mr. Stebbins stated. "What you saw was a goblin."

Julie nodded, gazing down wide-eyed at the ground, her arms clasped around her knees. "Yes," she said. "That sounds like what it was. It frightened me. I was so afraid. I turned and ran. It seemed so horrible." She looked up at her brother, smiling a little. "But I'm better now . . ."

Ken rubbed his big dark hands together, nodding with relief. "Fine," he said. "Now we can get back to work. There's a lot to do. A lot of things to get done."



Have you ever stood before a library shelf and experienced a keen, anticipatory delight in the documentary titles of a rare assemblage of books? Such titles as FAMINE FIGHTERS *and* MEN AGAINST DISASTER, *for instance, or* THE BATTLE OF THE TEST TUBES? *Just such a thrill is sure to accompany your reading pleasure fulfillment in our August issue under the title* EPIDEMIC ON VENUS, *by Ed M. Clinton, Jr. Daring in plot and startlingly "different" in treatment this superb lead novelette of medical pioneers in the forest primeval of Earth's bright evening star will hold you entranced.*

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a lady in satin

by . . . Irving E. Cox, Jr.

The Prince of Darkness was never one to advise murder. It was far too crude. But more insidious blooms grew wild in the fields of fantasy.

HERBERT YOUNGALL pushed open the stained-glass door and stole quietly into the dismal hall, ribbons of gray fog following him in from the street. Stealthily he collapsed his umbrella and inched it into the China umbrella jar. Nonetheless, Eloise must have heard him, for her voice rang out from the second floor.

"You're late, Herbert. Did you bring the rolls?"

His heart lurched. Desperately he fingered the paper in his pocket; and it seemed to give him courage.

"Oh, the rolls," he lied. "The shop was closed when I—"

"Don't bother inventing excuses. You simply forgot everything I told you to do. It's Mental Health night, and I did so want rolls for the sandwiches!"

"They're meeting here again?"

"Naturally. In half an hour."

"I'll dress in the study. I—ah—I don't suppose there's anything on the stove? I haven't had dinner yet, Eloise, and—"

"When I have a committee, we must eat by five. You know that, Herbert."

As always his mind shook with

If you should really make a pact with Lucifer—if you should throw caution to the winds and mortgage your future for a handsome aavantage here and now—would you expect to be outwitted in the end? You would, of course, for the legend always turns out that way. But just suppose Lucifer were a woman and—but we're determined to enhance the luster of this superbly witty and exhilarating fantasy by letting Irving Cox relate it himself.

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furious anger, but he said nothing. There was nothing for him to say. It was the same old story, repeated monotonously over the years. Once, a long time ago, he might have stood his ground; but, since he hadn't then, there was no hope of doing so now. No hope, and no way out —except for the paper in his pocket.

He fingered the crumpled sheet again, and a flame of hope soared in his soul. It was fantastic, medieval nonsense perhaps. But it was a slim straw, and the last gasp of his individual ego was forcing him to reach out for it.

He hung his dripping overcoat in the closet and went into the tiny, dark room which Eloise called his study. Cluttered with plants, extra folding chairs, a metal shopping cart, a dressmaker's dummy, stacks of old Christmas cards, piles of unhung curtains, furniture covers, and knick-knacks of Eloise's that she couldn't bring herself to dispose of, the room was Herbert's only by courtesy. True, it contained a desk which belonged to him, but it was years since he had used it. Somehow, he hadn't wanted to.

With throbbing heart, he shut the study door and cleared a space on the faded carpet. He took the sheet of paper out of his pocket and opened it under the battered table lamp.

The directions were not hard to follow. *"To summon the Prince of Darkness, mark ye first a circle divided into sixteen segments of equal measure, and at each point thereon make these signs . . ."*

Herbert had done the translation from the Medieval Latin himself, and he was sure of its accuracy.

The idea had occurred to him when the university library first put on display its new Witchcraft Collection. For a long time he had studied the books and manuscripts, under the guise of research for his Heritages course. Not until that afternoon had he whipped up enough courage to make a copy of the incantation to Satan, at a moment when the graduate reading room was temporarily deserted.

As he drew the geometric pattern in chalk on the carpet, a small part of his mind seemed to withdraw from the rest, scornfully reminding him that he was an educated, intelligent man playing a childish game with antiquated superstition. He suffered a moment of intense panic when he thought what could follow if Mrs. Schlesser walked in on the experiment. Or Eloise. He wasn't sure which would have been more embarrassing, to be discovered by his wife or by the woman who headed his department.

He completed the last sign and repeated the final verse. With shaking fingers he set a match to the crucible of chemicals. For an instant the mixture flamed high, blinding him. Acrid smoke mushroomed toward the ceiling.

"Oh—hello."

Herbert's eyes adjusted slowly after the glare. He saw a woman

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at the study door. The front door stood ajar behind her, and fog curled into the hall, swirling around her hips like feathers of smoke.

"A woman!" he whispered. "Naturally. I should have guessed he—you—would be a woman."

She was the most attractive woman Herbert had ever seen, tall and slender, wearing a long, black satin gown that caressed the soft curves of her body. Her glossy, gleaming, black hair was swept up from her head, coiled into an ebony crown.

"You—you're Dr. Youngall?" she asked.

"I expect you'll want to make the usual contract," he said. "Let's get it over quickly. My wife's having one of her infernal parties in a few minutes, and I'd like to have this settled first."

"Oh, yes, the—ah—the contract." Absently she studied the design he had made on the carpet.

"I don't have much in the way of a soul to offer you," he apologized. "But I'm not asking much, either. Just to feel like a person again; it shouldn't be hard. The word that sums up my predicament is *henpecked*—by my wife; by Mrs. Schlesser; by nearly every woman I know. I realize, now, that every man's in the same boat, whether he knows it or not, since the devil—that is—since you're a woman."

"My appearance, Dr. Youngall, changes to suit the universe of the person who sees me. Sometimes I seem to have the shape of another race, sometimes of a stereotype of personality traits. Usually, I'm two dimensional rather than three, a sort of hodge-podge of prejudices and fears. I'm seldom quite as finished as you've made me. But let's get on with your story."

"There isn't much to tell," he said. "Eloise and I have been married for twenty-three years. In all that time, she's managed everything I do—everything!—my career, the kind of clothes I wear, the people I choose for friends. She's earned all my promotions for me. I've never done anything for myself. Three years ago Eloise pulled strings and had me transferred to the School of Education, to teach their survey course called World Heritages. It meant a thousand dollars more a year, but my department head is Mrs. Schlesser. If possible, she's even worse than Eloise."

"You want me to get you out of all this, Dr. Youngall?"

"Not out of it," he explained rapidly. "That's asking too much. Once I thought of—" He paused, but withholding a contemplated sin seemed pointless before his present audience. "Once I thought of murdering my wife, but—"

"Oh, no, Dr. Youngall! Murder is so crude. I never advise it."

"I couldn't have gone through with it," he admitted. "I'd have bungled something. I've considered running out on the whole mess, too—disappearing; going somewhere else; starting my life over again

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with another name. But I don't have the courage for that, either. The only work I can do is teaching, and a classics scholar isn't exactly in demand these days."

He was surprised how easily he could talk to her. With anyone else he could not have been honest. But since she was what she was, Herbert assumed that she already read the secret places of his soul; the frank confession was only a matter of routine.

"I'm not asking for—for miracles, if that's the word you people use," he went on. "I want to be able to feel that I'm important because of myself—not just a convenient errand boy for Eloise, or a hired clerk for Mrs. Schlesser. These parties and committee meetings of Eloise's, for example—couldn't you arrange it for her to lose some of her popularity, at least on two or three nights of the week? Or give me the strength to refuse to attend?"

"The major miracle—yes, we do use the word occasionally, Dr. Youngall—has to take place within yourself. It could be done."

He sighed with relief. "Then you'll make the contract?" Hopefully he pulled back his sleeve and bared his wrist. "I have a pocket knife, but perhaps you get the blood in your own—"

"For the signing?" She laughed pleasantly. "We don't literally make out a deed these days. A verbal agreement is binding enough for our purposes."

Suddenly Eloise's voice rang out from the head of the stairway. "Herbert, dear, is someone with you?" It was the saccharine music her tone played before guests. "Take their coats, dear; I'll be right down."

"You'll have to go!" Herbert whispered frantically. "If Eloise were to find you here—"

"All hell would break loose?" the woman asked, wickedly self-possessed. "That's one situation I'm equipped to handle."

"But you don't understand! The Mental Health Chapter is meeting here tonight. Eloise will know you weren't invited."

"I'll be here with Dr. Granson, as his house guest." Her voice brightened. "I may even find it convenient to play the part of an eminent psychiatrist. I'll call myself—ah—Eve Black. The name seems appropriate."

Leering with delight, she turned away, swinging her hips rhythmically as she strolled into the living room.

Herbert Youngall whistled happily as he scrubbed out the chalk circle with the toe of his shoe. He was still whistling when Eloise opened the door and barked angrily because he had not yet changed the baggy tweeds which he habitually wore to class. Then her nose tilted toward the ceiling, and she began to sniff, a little like an excited rabbit.

"What's that awful smell, Her-

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bert? You've been smoking again! You know it makes you sick."

When Eloise asked a question, she usually answered it herself. She disapproved of his smoking because the fumes irritated her throat. If she had admitted as much honestly, Herbert would never have thought of continuing the habit. But Eloise chose to twist the facts into an apparent concern over his health.

"Wear your double-breasted Oxford," she went on, "and, for heaven's sake, Herbert, don't waste any more time. Your guests are here now!" The pronoun was a fiction she had invented years before. The parties and committee meetings were always Herbert's, rather than hers.

Herbert took pains in dressing, more so than he had for years. He deliberately chose a brilliant, scarlet necktie, because Eloise disliked it. Just before he left the study, he rummaged in the drawer of the desk until he found an ancient pipe and a half-empty can of very stale tobacco. He was happily puffing upon the pipe when he went to join the guests in the living room. It had a rare aroma.

That evening the Mental Health Chapter was concerning itself with juvenile delinquency. Herbert was amazed at the ease with which Eve Black engaged in the discussion. Granting that she was, by Stygian endowment, an authority on the subject, surely none of the others were aware of that; yet, whenever she spoke, they listened with respectful attention.

As a matter of fact, the deference of the group was so evident, Herbert began to wonder if any of them might have made contracts with hell, too. A wild amusement billowed into his throat; it was with difficulty that he restrained his laughter.

Herbert customarily sat in a corner during his wife's meetings, agonizing through the monotony until time mercifully brought the ordeal to an end. But that evening his bubbling good humor could not be contained in silence. Willy-nilly, he had to say something. To Herbert himself, his contribution seemed pointless and a trifle inane, but Eve Black caught it up as golden wisdom and cried for more.

Herbert obliged. The words flowed from him in a torrent. Except for Eloise, the whole group seemed entranced. Though Herbert had no experience basis of comparison, he imagined his present feeling was comparable to an extravagant drunk.

He had no idea exactly what he said, but he was conscious that the discussion strayed somewhat from the point, for shortly the group was joking and punning in an outrageous manner and one or two ventured to tell some pleasantly off-color stories. Eloise struggled with her agenda and her points of order, but she was ignored.

The evening belonged to Herbert. And Eve Black. She clung to

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his arm, clearly fascinated by everything he said, chuckling at his small ironies, laughing uproariously when he joked. There was an hypnotic fragrance of gardenias in her perfume; when she came close to him the scent seemed to rise up and throw a delightful fog over his mind. For a moment, the soft touch of her hand, the worship in the depths of her black eyes, seemed to satisfy the dry, dusty yearning for companionship that had gnawed at Herbert's soul for years. It did something to him.

Suddenly Herbert was surprised to find the party was over. The guests had gone. He was alone with Eloise. It was like awakening from a dream on a cold winter morning.

"Well, I certainly hope you enjoyed yourself!" she snapped. "Whatever got into you, Herbert? You acted an utter fool." She sighed and shook her head. "When you clear away the dishes, be sure to put the cheese back in the icebox. I can use it again tomorrow."

Apparently Eloise had served refreshments. Herbert became aware of dirty plates and cups scattered on the end tables. Eloise always expected him to clear up after she had entertained, since the business of presiding exhausted her, and obedient to tradition he began to move toward the kitchen. Then he stopped, remembering his contract.

"I've had a long day, Eloise," he said, "and if you don't mind—"

"Mind? Of course I mind! How do you expect me to keep this house running, without a little help once in a while?"

"But I have an eight o'clock lecture, Eloise."

"And I suppose you don't realize that tomorrow is club day, and I *must meet with the mission board* in the morning. Put the dishes in the dining room cabinet after you wash them. And, please, Herbert, for my sake, don't stumble all over yourself when you come to bed! Sometimes I think you mean to drive me stark mad with the noise you make."

Having somehow lost one point in the shuffle of her dialogue, he sought desperately to win another. He said, "If you could leave a light for me, Eloise—"

"Don't be ridiculous. You know I can't stand that when I'm trying to sleep."

She turned and climbed the stairway. The warm glow of Eve Black still clung to Herbert's soul, but it wasn't strong enough to goad him into outright defiance. Meekly he stacked the dishes and carried them into the kitchen.

But after a night's sleep something happened to him. He felt a tenuous security, a strange joy in being alive. This day was going to be different from all others. For a condition, he had sold his soul to hell. He could begin to collect his part of the bargain. He would be able to do as he pleased, and no catastrophe would follow. The sudden vista of limitless personal free-

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dom was breathtaking, a stimulant that set flame to his blood.

The first effect of the new freedom came when he lectured that morning. The subject, by coincidence, was Dante's *Inferno*. His discussion of the seven hells and the souls in torment breathed suddenly with life, so vividly that even the Physical Education majors in the back row stayed awake and attempted to take notes. It was a moment of triumph that came rarely to a professor of classical antiquities.

During the morning a student brought him a curt *"Memo from the desk of Adelaide Schlesser"* summoning him to a curriculum conference as soon as he was free. That would be noon, as Mrs. Schlesser was well aware, and it meant that Herbert would have to sacrifice his brief lunch hour.

But he was afraid, rather than angry. The conflict with Mrs. Schlesser had been intermittently mounting toward a climax for more than a year. As head of his department, she was determined to remove Dr. Youngall from it, and she felt constrained to proceed against him obliquely. Herbert knew that the real reason for her opposition was her own inadequate scholarship; he understood his subject, and she did not.

Yet, in order to demonstrate that the reverse was true, she persisted in challenging him on the content of his lectures, in whimsically rearranging his course without reason. For him it was a continual bitterness, but he swallowed the indignity because he could not give up the extra money he made teaching the Heritages course.

When his last lecture was over, Herbert plodded wearily across the campus toward Mrs. Schlesser's office. Eve Black joined him by the campus fountain. She was wearing horn-rimmed glasses, and a crisp, black business suit, decorously set off with a linen blouse and a pearl lapel pin. The parts were the typical costume chosen by a scholarly and deliberately sexless young lady in the throes of the graduate school; but their sum, as Miss Black wore them, became spectacularly alluring, sensuous to an extreme.

Again Herbert was overwhelmed by the fragrance of her perfume.

"Are you going to take me to lunch, Dr. Youngall?" she asked, slipping her arm through his.

"I—ah—as a matter of fact, I have another appointment, Miss Black." His throat constricted in a cozy spurt of warmth, and it was almost impossible for him to say no.

"Put it off."

"Well, you see, Miss Black—"

"Please, Dr. Youngall, call me Eve."

"Usually I have lunch at home—uh—Eve. Crackers and a can of soup. Eloise has so many meetings, she has to eat out, of course, but we can't afford it if I do, too."

"Oh, but this is an occasion, Dr. Youngall!"

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As they walked toward the street, her soft hand closed over his; he felt as if his body were being pleasantly transformed into a pliable, shivering jelly, spiralling playfully in a liquid whirlpool of changing light.

They went—or, to put it more exactly, she took him—to the popular hangout near the campus which boasted the unoriginal name of "Campus Inn" on its bowed, vaguely Colonial front window. It was thronged with students bolting giant burgers, health salads, or double malts—depending upon the rate of their individual metabolism.

Eve Black found an empty booth near the bar and ordered for both of them. Old Fashioneds had just been put on the table when Herbert looked up to find Mrs. Schlesser towering above him, the mountain of her breast quivering with emotion.

"I was under the impression that we had an appointment, Dr. Youngall," she said.

Herbert began to stammer a reply, but Eve Black broke in sweetly, "Won't you join us, Mrs. Schlesser?"

"I think not." Mrs. Schlesser eyed the cocktails pointedly. "I'll snatch a bite at the counter. I do hope you'll find time to see me at your earliest convenience this afternoon, Dr. Youngall."

That was the only small unpleasantness of Herbert's *tête a tête* luncheon with Eve Black. The rest moved along delightfully, in the same dreamy aura that had submerged him the night before. Undergraduates kept eyeing them curiously from a distance; Herbert supposed they would have whistled if they dared. And there was one small interruption when Eve got up for a moment and spoke to a tall, thin boy eating at the counter.

"A religion major," she explained. "I thought I might be able to—ah—to straighten out some of the doubts in his mind."

Herbert saw Dr. Granson enter the crowded restaurant from the street; the psychologist waved pleasantly over the heads of the students, but made no effort to join them, which seemed somewhat peculiar to Herbert, since Dr. Granson was Eve Black's host.

Herbert toyed with the idea that Granson might have long ago made a contract with hell; otherwise, Eve Black could not have used him as she did. But it seemed entirely fantastic. The psychologist was so sanely sound, so clearly successful in his own right; what need would he have had for the help of the supernatural?

When Eve and Dr. Youngall had finished their rather extensive lunch, she lit a cigarette and moved closer to him, so that the soft curve of her shoulder was touching his.

"You told me last night that you particularly disliked Eloise's meetings and parties," she said. "But, as far as I could see, you seemed to be enjoying yourself."

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"Last night, yes. I can't understand why."

"What is it you want changed?"

"Being forced to go, I suppose, when I'd rather—"

"But you don't need me to do that for you, Dr. Youngall! Simply tell Eloise no."

He looked away from her guiltily. "That's very hard—well, frankly, impossible for me to do. And there's another thing, too. Eloise talks so much about her guests afterwards. She pulls their characters apart, pokes fun at everything they have said. They're all hypocrites, I suppose, but it's nauseating for me to watch the process. I've always thought—" He paused and his body tensed with excitement. "Why, of course, you could do it, with a truth potion!"

He stared at her.

"A potion?" Miss Black repeated incredulously. "I haven't heard that word in centuries!"

"All the old manuscripts are full of recipes for love potions. Wouldn't you be able to make a truth potion to give Eloise?"

"Possibly. Why?"

"It would be such poetic justice if she would have to say to the faces of her friends what she whispers when they are gone."

"You really think that could solve your problem?"

He looked into her eyes and saw something enigmatic and unreadable, and some of the warmth seemed to fade from the touch of her hand. He felt unsure of himself, but he gave her an affirmative answer nonetheless.

"I'll see what I can do." Miss Black crushed out her cigarette and stood up. "Your wife is entertaining again tonight. I'll bring you something to put in her wine. Now don't be late again for your appointment with Mrs. Schlesser."

Normally Herbert's conference with Mrs. Schlesser would have worried him to the point of incoherence. Mrs. Schlesser was an opinionated, noisy woman, boisterously happy in her heavy-handed use of authority. Herbert was quite honestly frightened of her, and the comfortable income he made in her department seemed too much to jeopardize on a point of scholastic principle. Even though he knew she was wrong, he had always compromised, temporized, and conformed, ashamed of himself and yet helpless.

But now he was bolstered by the new security of his alliance with hell. Mrs. Schlesser launched an evaluation of Dr. Youngall's presentation of the Greek drama; and quietly he disagreed with her—although his throat went cold and his knees shook beneath him. That he had ventured any comment at all confused her, and she was not equipped to win her point on a basis of scholarship. She resorted to authority, and Herbert found the courage to walk out on the conference.

"As long as I'm teaching Heritages," he said, "you'll have to al-

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low me to be the final judge of what I teach."

"I am amazed at your insubordination, Dr. Youngall!" Staring at him coldly, she hurled her last bolt. "Unless you and I can iron this situation out right now, I'm afraid it will have to be settled by the president of the university."

"Yes, perhaps it should."

Afterwards he realized that a major miracle had taken place. He had defied Mrs. Schlesser and survived. The threat of discussing the problem with the president was nebulous and vaguely distant. Herbert was amazed to discover that it was, apparently, the only force she could use against him. For years, then, he had lived in dread of nothing.

And he had accomplished the teapot revolution himself. Eve Black had not been there, nor had she suggested what he should say. At any time during the years of tormenting insecurity, Herbert could have done as much. Discomforting doubts of his contract with hell washed uneasily over his mind. Had he sold his soul for this, which he could have wrought for himself? It was a frightening idea; he couldn't allow himself to dwell upon its implications.

Herbert finished his last lecture at four. When he went home Eloise was waiting for him in the living room, sharpening her claws by keeping her eyes fixed on the mantle clock. She came directly to the point.

"Mrs. Schlesser called, Herbert."

"I thought she might." He hung his coat in the closet and calmly took his pipe out of his pocket.

"There's nothing I can do for you now. I worked so hard for this promotion, Herbert! And you've thrown it away for nothing."

"It's not that serious, Eloise; I'm still teaching Heritages."

"Only because of Adelaide Schlesser's consideration for me. Now, Herbert, first thing tomorrow morning, I want you to go to her and—"

"I believe I'll settle this my own way."

The defiance was so quietly spoken it swept upon her unawares. Her eyebrows arched and her shoulders stiffened with indignation.

"Very well, Herbert," she said, "bungle this if you like, but don't turn to me for help when you do."

The familiar lash was in her voice, but the ring of authority seemed false and hollow. They were both entirely aware that he never had asked her help. To escape this thin ice, she changed the subject quickly.

"At all events," she said, "I'm glad you came home early. I want some cookies for tonight. You'll have to run over to the bakery and get them."

"You'd better do it yourself, Eloise. I've some work I want to finish."

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"Why, Herbert! What a way to talk—to me!"

"Before you go, would you clear some of your things out of my study? It's so cluttered I can't use it."

"Whatever this foolishness is that's got into you—"

"I've gone completely to hell, haven't I?" He carried her dressmaker's dummy out of the study and stood it in the hall. "Do you want this, or should I dispose of it?"

She glared at him, her mouth working; but no words came. Very deliberately he stuffed the bowl of his pipe and ran a match across the surface of hard-packed tobacco. Furiously speechless, she snatched up the dummy and began to lug it up the stairs. He called after her. "Hereafter, Eloise, don't plan dinner for any earlier than six. It'll be more convenient for me that way."

That evening Eloise entertained the social committee of the faculty club. To them she traditionally served sherry, and it was Herbert's duty to pour the wine and bring it in from the kitchen. No situation could have been more ideally made for the stealthy administration of the truth potion to Eloise.

Puffing on his pipe, Herbert was arranging the last tray when Eve Black silently pushed open the back door. She gave him a white tablet, telling him to dissolve it in his wife's wine. Eagerly he pounded the glowing tobacco out of his pipe, and dropped the pipe into his pocket. He slid the tablet into one of the glasses on the tray.

"It'll work at once? Tonight?" he demanded.

"No; in about eighteen hours—sometime early tomorrow afternoon."

"She'll know when it happens?"

"I'm not sure. A potion is a queer thing, Dr. Youngall. It isn't a drug, the way you people think of them nowadays. It depends on—well, we could say on external factors. You're absolutely certain this is what you want to do?"

"Of course I am!"

"Then it ought to—" Eve Black hesitated and seemed to change her mind. "It ought to do what you expect of it." She squeezed his hand and smiled into his eyes. "Lots of luck, Dr. Youngall!"

Eve Black slipped away. Herbert picked up the tray and went into the living room. At the bottom of his wife's glass was a tiny disk of white, a part of the tablet that had not entirely dissolved.

As he entered the living room, Eloise let out a polite yelp, pointing to his pocket. He saw a whisp of blue smoke. He set the tray down and took his pipe out of the pocket, beating out a tiny, live coal that had lodged in the cloth.

"I declare," Eloise whispered, through clenched teeth; "you bungle everything, Herbert!"

She served the sherry herself, with a martyr's air. In the embarrassing silence, with all the guests looking at him in various attitudes

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of suppressed amusement, Herbert wolfed his sherry foolishly. It was not until he had drained the glass that he saw the white pinhead lying at the bottom of the crystal. He had, himself, taken the potion intended for Eloise.

It was very funny. He began to laugh. And the laughter roared out of control. No admonition from Eloise could stop it; nor the sudden alarm of her guests. He was weak and babbling with hysteria when four of the men carried him upstairs and laid him on his bed. He was only vaguely conscious that his doctor came, examined him, and jabbed a hypodermic into his arm.

Herbert awoke the next morning refreshed, clear-headed, bursting with exuberance. Eloise told him he was not to go to class. It was the doctor's opinion that he was dangerously tired, on the verge of a breakdown, and should rest quietly in bed for a day or so.

Herbert brushed the argument aside. There was nothing wrong with him. It was amusing that he had bungled the most delightful revenge he could imagine, but it made very little difference. Since he had already sold himself to hell, the fact that shortly he would be incapable of even a polite social lie would not alter his own situation. On the contrary, he would be considerably entertained watching the reactions of his friends.

A disconcerting realization came to him as he crossed the campus toward his classroom. Eloise, that morning, had been sincerely concerned—for him. Even her voice had been different, almost natural and unaffected, as he remembered it from the first year of their marriage. It was something of a shock to find that he was still in love with her, in spite of the bitterness that lay between them.

For an instant he wondered if the fault was not his as much as hers, but the self-protective shell of his ego rejected it. Nonetheless, he was strangely glad that he had not given the truth potion to Eloise. Revenge seemed suddenly meaningless; he wanted something else.

After his second lecture that morning, Mrs. Schlesser made a point of seeing him. She was obviously giving him a chance to back down from the position he had taken with her. He chatted politely about nothing, but, whatever the consequences, he was determined not to take the bait.

To save her face, Mrs. Schlesser had no alternative but to make good her threat. A terse memo summoned Dr. Youngall to meet with Mrs. Schlesser and the president of the university at two o'clock that afternoon.

Herbert faced the ultimate test of his alliance with hell at the precise hour when the truth potion would begin to work. It would render him incapable of even the conventional lies of social intercourse and, by making him appear boorish rather than diplomatic, put him at a tremendous disadvantage.

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Mrs. Schlesser, however, had chosen to attack his scholarship rather than his insubordination. Herbert defended himself easily, and the decision was clearly his. Mrs. Schlesser departed from the conference in a seething fury, poorly concealed. The president asked Herbert to stay and talk.

"I'm pleased with the work you've been doing lately," he said. "It seems to me that's the sort of teaching we want." He got up from his desk and strolled to his window overlooking the campus. With his back turned, he explained casually, "We're contemplating some changes in the School of Education next year, Dr. Youngall. I wonder if you'd be interested."

"Interested?"

"Mrs. Schlesser is a fine organizer; an aggressive, dominating personality; the kind of woman who gets things done, and done well."

"Very efficient," Herbert said. Because the words seemed to fall dead in the utter void of silence, he added the veneer of a harmless lie, "And a very admirable woman, too. I've always found her quite inspiring."

"I'm glad to hear you say that; I was afraid there might be bad blood in your department."

"Oh, no," Herbert lied again, without any hesitation, this time in his own defense. "We've always worked together very well."

The president turned to face him. "I'm going to move Mrs. Schlesser into the upper division, where she can be in charge of practice teachers. Could you handle her old job?"

Herbert's soul sang, but the words caught in his throat.

"It occurs to me that we need a man in her spot—particularly a man of your training, with a solid background in the classics."

Herbert left the president's office on wings.

The full realization of what had happened hit him as he walked across the campus. It literally knocked him breathless; he collapsed weakly on a green bench beside the campus fountain.

He had lied! Quite easily and naturally he had lied of his own free will. The truth potion was nothing, then; an illusion, perhaps, but no more.

On the heels of that realization came a second, even more overpowering. He had fought the struggle with Mrs. Schlesser and won the promotion on a basis of his own ability. No miracle from heaven or hell had intervened to save him.

Suddenly he understood.

Eve Black was precisely what she had said she was when they first met: a visiting psychiatrist. Otherwise, she could not have pretended to be Dr. Granson's guest. Herbert saw clearly what had happened. She had come early to the meeting of the Mental Health Chapter. She had found him absorbed in the neuroticism of a medieval ritual. Accustomed to dealing with psychopathics, she had played along with his fantasy, perhaps to make

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a case study, perhaps to help him if she could.

He arose from the bench and walked slowly home. A mellow lightness filled his soul. Through an illusion and madness, he had found himself and reality. Could he have asked for anything more in the way of a miracle? Nothing in the whole legendary world of the supernatural could have done as much for him as he had for himself.

It was late when he opened the stained glass door and went into the dark, faintly musty hall. Gray shadows splashed over the pulsing silence. The house was empty and still. It was bridge-club day and Herbert knew Eloise would not be home for another thirty minutes. She would dash in, then, slap together a meal out of cans, and be on her way again.

He threw his coat over the seat of the hall rack, and went to the telephone alcove. He intended to call Eve Black and thank her for what she had done. As he dialed Dr. Granson's number, the shadows in the hall seemed to shift subtly. He whirled, expecting to see Eloise behind him, but the hall was empty. The hair at the back of his head stiffened and an unaccountable chill shot through his body.

After an interminable wait, Dr. Granson answered the call.

"This is Herbert Youngall; may I speak to Eve Black?"

"To whom?"

"Miss Black; the young lady you brought the other night."

Dr. Granson laughed pleasantly. "I dare say this is a joke of some sort, Herbert; but I'm afraid I don't get it. I don't know any Eve Black."

"She was with me in the Campus Inn today. You spoke to us when you came in!"

"Herbert, you were sitting there alone, enjoying a quiet cocktail. You had such a—such a thoughtful expression on your face, I waved but I didn't want to disturb you. I imagined you were thinking through your lecture for—"

"Oh, yes." Herbert felt as if the darkness in the hall were rising up to strangle him. "It is a—a joke, Granson. I'll explain later."

He hung up, and turned to face the swirling shadows in the hall, and the bleak shape of reality. Eve Black did not exist. When she had spoken so brilliantly to the Mental Health Chapter, it had been Herbert who did the talking. No wonder Mrs. Schlesser had reacted so oddly to the invitation to join them in the Campus Inn! Fleeing from the torment of his dilemma, he had plunged close to the edge of schizophrenic madness. Out of the torment of his own mind, he had created Eve Black in the image of the thing he feared.

But that rationalization explained nothing! Even now, coldly sane and confident of himself, he could smell the heady fragrance of Eve Black's perfume.

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Suddenly a darker shadow among the others seemed to take the sensuous shape of a beautiful woman, dressed in black satin. The gloom closed around Herbert, paralyzing him.

A dead voice spoke within the confines of his mind, "You could make your incantation to hell again —to prove it was just an hallucination. When you tried before, you had no soul of your own; hell won't bargain for peanuts. Try it again, Dr. Youngall. This time—"

As if he had been drugged, robbed of volition, he moved sluggishly toward the study. But at the door he paused, shaking the strangling mist of his soul. His face was streaked with sweat, and his body felt so weak he had to lean against the jamb to keep from collapsing. He tried to cry out against the encroaching silence, but his voice was a breathless whisper.

"I don't need spells or potions—the superstitious trappings of fairy-tales! I've found how to make my own miracles. I'll settle for that; and for my own failures, if I must."

A cold wind stirred through the hall, like the sad whisper of a distant sea, sweeping aside the clinging oppression. The voice spoke again, fading slowly, awesomely.

"All men are capable of both good and evil. You could have made your own hell, too."

The stained glass door banged open, and Herbert's strength returned in a surge of vitality. Eloise came in, dumping an armload of bundles on a chair.

"Oh, you're home, Herbert. I've been shopping."

She took off her coat and walked toward him.

"Mrs. Schlesser telephoned to tell me what happened in the president's office. I—Herbert, I'm glad you stuck to your guns!" Very shyly she reached for his hand and, when he did not draw away, she held it tight while she looked up into his eyes.

"I wanted to surprise you with something special for dinner; I suppose I stayed at market longer than I should. Afterwards I thought we—just the two of us, I mean—could go to a movie, the way we used to." She hesitated briefly. "Herbert, I cancelled the committee meeting for tonight."

Very gently he put his arms around her. As their lips met, twenty lost years sank into oblivion behind them.

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honeymoon on dlecka

by . . . Murray Leinster

If you're planning a honeymoon on the planet Dlecka you had better not count on privacy. The Dlecks, you see, feel everything.

GRANT AND Cecilia belonged to very rich and very conservative families, so when they were married the only outward signs of festivity was the trail of confetti and streamers which fluttered along the four-thousand-foot level as the wedding party went to the spaceport.

The honeymoon ship itself was one of the Connor Line boats—Grant's family owned the Connor line—and a special bridal suite had been fitted up for them. Everyone knew they were making a very special thing of their honeymoon and only a cargo-boat such as this could take them to their destination. There was no thought of ostentation. Their families were so firmly conservative that Grant had taken a semester of Applied Philanthropy at college, and Cecilia had had three half-terms of sculpture to fit her to be a patron of the arts.

The idea of their honeymoon was enlightened altruism. They were going to begin their married life on Dlecka. It was off all normal space-ship lines, hence the special cabin. They would be the only

Here he is, the dean of science-fiction writers and the brightest of binaries in that wide and resplendently enduring firmament where Fancy sits enthroned! We are more than delighted to welcome Murray Leinster for the first time to FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *and we're sure that no other writer in the genre has quite such an impressive list of novels, novelettes and short stories to his credit, or has maintained such a consistently high standard of excellence across the years. You'll remember this unusual yarn.*

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human beings on the whole planet, and they considered it a delightful prospect.

During their first blissful weeks and months together they would let their mutual love demonstrate to the inhabitants of a benighted planet the charm and desirability of the human way of life. When the spotted-green-and-white Dlecka appreciated Terrestrial culture, they would want to buy mirrors, printed textiles, cheap liquor, visiphone records, sardines in oil, and other aids to high civilization.

Grant and Cecilia thought it would be beautifully romantic to civilize a race of shy aborigines as a memorial to their love. Their families considered it a good business proposition.

So they were married and escorted hilariously to the spaceport, and their honeymoon craft took off. When out of atmosphere it swung sedately and aimed itself at Orion's left ear. Then it flashed into overdrive and vanished completely.

It stayed in overdrive for three days, which Grant and Cecilia spent in blissful seclusion. When the overdrive bubble and stars were again visible, Grant was tenderly possessive and Cecilia had only to be awake to be starry-eyed.

The idea of their honeymoon seemed more attractive than ever. They looked out the ship-ports at the great, writhing ball of fire which was the sun about which Dlecka revolved. It was then some hundreds of millions of miles away.

They were impatient during the tedious business of finding Dlecka and the computation of the microsecond flicker into overdrive which brought them within planetary-drive distance. And during the orbital circuits, while the ship settled down and the seas and continents of the planet flowed beneath them, they were filled with anticipation.

They liked being alone. The prospect of solitude on Dlecka was charming. They were delighted when the ship sat down in an open glade surrounded by the bulbous trees of this small world. They stepped out on the ground together.

It was practically a paradise for honeymooners. The air was perfect, and the climate had been chosen to be neither enervating nor unduly harsh. The vegetation was strange, to be sure. Tree-tops were not tangles of branches and twigs and leaves. The trees on Dlecka grew like huge gourds, and their foliage grew on them like turf. The Dlecka hollowed them out and lived in them, so there was not one artificial roof on the whole planet.

This was one of the things Grant and Cecilia meant to change.

The ship stayed aground for two days. There was a honeymoon cottage in the hold, shipped knocked down. The ship's crew set it up. They drilled a well. They planted a tiny atomic pile for power, they set out the very latest mutated plants in a garden, and they established a perfect sample of the high-

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est and most praiseworthy terrestrial culture.

The Dlecka were to be steered to a new high destiny. What they'd do with it did not bother Grant and Cecilia. They loved each other, and their intentions were admirable. All prospects pleased, and of course the Dlecka were not vile!

They were thrilled when the ship sealed off and rose swiftly toward the sky. A honeymoon alone on a world which needed the fine lessons they could teach it! But especially being alone together on a new and hospitable planet . . . The thought itself was almost the equivalent of the bliss which would be sure to follow.

The ship vanished and they were alone—for something under two minutes forty seconds.

They looked up at the tiny white speck of cloud which was the ship's vertical contrail, left behind in the stratosphere. They looked at each other. The sunshine was brilliant. The smells of growing things were familiar—they had to be, since the vegetation worked on chlorophyl—and yet there were delicious, exotic smells of unknown blossoms.

Grant put his arms tenderly about Cecilia. "My darling!" he said raptly. "Now we are really alone!"

Her eyes shining, Cecilia lifted her lips to his. They kissed.

There was a small but rousing cheer from the edge of the clear space in which the honeymoon cottage stood.

Grant jumped a foot. The edge of the forest around this glade was alive with Dlecka. There were hundreds of them. They averaged between three and four feet tall, and they were mottled green and greenish and white, and they wore belts in which they tucked things they wanted to carry around with them, or else aprons which in strict fact were pockets.

They waved their skinny arms and cheered again as Cecilia blushfully hid her face on Grant's shoulder.

Then the Dlecka came rushing to make their acquaintance.

They gave an immediate and truthful impression of charmed adoration of the newly-married pair of humans. They were distinctly froggy in appearance, but they were likeable if only because they were so delighted to have Grant and Cecilia in their midst. Their enthusiasm created a zestful din. An uproar of clicks and chattering speech filled the air.

They crowded about the bride and groom, not touching them but struggling among themselves to be nearest. They overwhelmed the garden and its plants so carefully brought from Earth.

"Hold it!" shouted Grant, though they couldn't possibly understand him. "You're ruining things! Move back! Steady!"

He waved his arms at them. They waved adoringly back. He headed for the house, taking Cecilia with him. The Dlecka followed, and

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surged in after him. They were not intrusive. They were entranced. Their one desire seemed to be to get as close as possible to the humans and stay there, grinning widely enough to split even their throats.

Grant started the tape-player. He played the introductory speech which had been made so carefully for him back on Earth. Loud clicks and chatterings came from the machine. Under the Dlecka words, a voice translated in English so Grant and Cecilia could always know what was being said, and when.

"*We—are—your friends,*" said the hushed English version. "*We—have come—to show you—ways to be—more happy.*"

The confidentially-toned English version continued underneath the difficult—to—pronounce Dlecka consonants. The Dlecka listened abstractedly. They gazed at Grant and Cecilia. They seemed utterly blissful merely to be near them. Which was the reason why Grant and Cecilia had considered themselves perfectly suited to lead them on to nobler things than they knew.

The introductory speech came to an end. The Dlecka, beaming, remained exactly where they were, except when one tried to squirm closer to the two humans. They were not interested in the cottage and its inspiring higher-civilization contents. They simply pushed and shoved and wriggled to come close to the happy humans, and gloated when they were nearest.

Grant was pleased, but a trifle annoyed. The small green creatures wriggled with pleasure. He said over their heads:

"Queer little characters, aren't they?"

"They're darling!" said Cecilia warmly. "I'm going to be able to make lovely sculptures of them!"

"I'll give them a treat," said Grant, "and then we'll shoo them away until we get settled."

He felt very noble and altruistic indeed. He went to a food-machine which was ready-prepared to provide hospitality to Dlecka guests. He punched the keys. Neatly packaged small portions of sardines, swimming in oil, came out. Each was on a sanitary plastic plate. Grant passed them around. Cecilia helped him.

The Dlecka accepted with enthusiasm. But that was all. They did nothing except hang around, gazing at the newlyweds with the grinning rapture of small boys on their first space-ride.

"I'm very glad you came," Grant told them kindly. "I hope we shall be friends."

Clicks and chatterings answered him. There was infinite cordiality, but no movement. Grant went to the vocabulary-speaker. Again he punched keys. The unlikely sounds of Dlecka speech came out, with a murmured English translation underneath.

"*Go home—now,*" said the translation. "*Come back—tomorrow. We will—be glad—to see—you.*"

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Cheerful chatterings answered. No Dlecka left.

"They seem pleased," said Grant, harassedly, "but we don't seem to get anywhere."

"They're dripping sardine-oil all over the floor," said Cecilia. Then she added brightly, "But it will clean."

"They're not stealing things, either," Grant told her, "and they're not even poking into the other rooms. They seem only to want to stay where we are!"

He was disappointed. The Dlecka were stated officially to have the faculty of reason, to be able to count and even to write numerals in a mathematical system with a basis of eight instead of ten. They had four fingers on each hand. They made iron tools and performed various technical processes.

But they were acting pretty stupidly right now! Grant felt a bare trace of irritation beneath his sensation of nobility.

"They know we like them," said Cecilia brightly: "I'm sure they'll pose for me to model them!"

"No doubt," agreed Grant. "But let's go outside and see if they follow."

They did. When Grant and Cecilia moved, the Dlecka zestfully made way for them—pushing and shoving—and closed in behind. They went out-of-doors and the Dlecka poured after them. They stayed immediately about the two humans. Two or three other Dlecka came tearing from the forest to join the welcoming party.

But nothing happened. Nothing at all. The sky was beautifully blue, and the sunshine was very bright, and all nature on the planet showed off at its best as if to welcome the bringers of civilization.

Grant ran his hand harassedly through his hair.

"I feel rather silly!" he said unhappily.

Cecilia took his hand. The Dlecka were adoring and hence adorable—rather like puppies. She felt pleased and proud that Grant had thought of this praiseworthy way to make his and her happiness work to the betterment of not-quite-human creatures. They would do them so much good! She squeezed Grant's hand tenderly, as an expression of gratitude that she was married to so remarkable a person.

There was a spontaneous cheer all about them. The Dlecka cheered. They capered and danced with joy.

Then Cecilia's mouth dropped open. She suddenly put two and two together. She went up to three and three, and then four and four.

She gasped: "G-grant! L-let's run in, and leave them outside! I've—I've got something to tell you! I'm afraid—"

He did not understand. Not yet. But he ran with her. The Dlecka scuttled out of the way before them, and then ran joyously beside and behind, making an enthusiastic din.

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Grant slammed the door. A tiny squealing arose, and he discovered that the small, snaky tendril of a Dlecka finger had been caught. He opened the door enough to release it and shut it grimly again.

"What's the matter, darling?" he asked anxiously.

Stammering, Cecilia told him. Then she burst into tears.

They stayed locked in the honeymoon cottage from which enlightenment was supposed to be ladled out to the Dlecka. The situation was acutely embarrassing.

The Dlecka were a highly emotional race. The official records revealed it in detail. Cecilia and Grant had planned their honeymoon among them because of it. The Dlecka were extraordinarily sensitive to moods and emotional atmosphere. Without being telepaths, they could sense the feelings, the sensations—as distinct from thoughts—of human beings.

When people scorned or despised them, they felt it keenly. When people disliked them—or even disliked other humans—they fled from the aura of aversion. But on the other hand, the vocabulary of their language had been collected by an eccentric biologist who had happened honestly to find them attractive. Him they had adored. They'd swarmed about him. They'd told him, trustfully, everything he wanted to know.

His report had been the inspiration for this planned honeymoon on the planet. Grant had reasoned brilliantly that since he and Cecilia would be beautifully happy on their honeymoon, the Dlecka would perceive their love and happiness. The records said that they were drawn to other Dlecka who were experiencing happiness, and to humans as well.

They sought out people who felt good, just as human savages sought out food that tasted good. They soaked themselves in radiated pleasant emotion or sensation. It was the basis of their culture. And obviously two people who loved each other tenderly would attract Dlecka, and such people could infuse into them high ideals of sanitation and canned food and Mother Hubbard costumes and psychiatry and the factory system.

So Cecilia's appalled disclosure was self-evident, once one thought about it. The Dlecka had cheered loudly when the humans essayed a connubial kiss before any Dlecka had been seen. They had cheered again, only a little less loudly, when Cecilia tenderly squeezed Grant's hand.

The official report said that they were not strictly speaking telepathic. But apparently they didn't miss much by the difference. Certainly she and Grant would not have the emotional privacy which is so charming a part of anybody's honeymoon.

Grant was as much aghast as Cecilia. Still, locked in their cottage they were safely alone. They could always lock themselves away.

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Only in public they must be—somewhat discreet in their tenderness. Grant authoritatively explained the matter to his bride.

She continued to weep—in embarrassment, now. He took her reassuringly in his arms. He kissed her tear-wet cheeks, murmuring consolation. Presently, timidly, she kissed him back.

They heard a muted cheering noise. Grant swore and looked up. He glared through a window. The outside of the house was a solid mass of Dlecka, packed closely against its walls.

It became clear that love laughed not only at locksmiths, but that walls were not a barrier to radiant bliss. The Dlecka shared the happy sensations of Grant and Cecilia when they comforted each other in the very first moment of stress in all their week of marriage.

Instants later, the Dlecka were fleeing. Grant made no threats. He offered no menaces. But his overwhelming impulse to Dleckicide affected them quite as much as his sensations of other and more amiable sorts. They did not like being tuned in on his rage. They ran away to escape it.

As he saw them flee, he understood. But he would not allow himself to feel relief. He turned back to Cecilia:

"I've chased them. It's simple enough! All we have to do is get mad! We can keep them miles away simply by getting into bad tempers."

Cecilia stared. She went to the window. She saw the last of the Dlecka dive into the forest of particularly bulbous trees. She turned back to Grant, her lips quivering.

A little later she fled into another room out of his sight. She wept there. Violently. He came in search of her.

"Darling!" he said, aghast. "What's the matter?"

"Y-you were angry!" wailed Cecilia.

"But not at you, darling!" protested Grant. "I only felt that I'd like to wring every one of their greenish necks!"

"But I—I never s-saw you angry before!" wailed Cecilia. "And—and they say husbands sometimes get angry with their wives! But if you ever get angry with me I'll die!"

He consoled her. He did rather well at it. Her sobbings ceased. She pressed relievedly close to him. He kissed her very tenderly indeed.

They heard a cheer. The Dlecka were back—some of them, anyhow. More of them were running from the forest.

In their second departure the Dlecka fairly flew across the clearing. From sheer acquired velocity, they shouldn't be able to stop within miles.

At nightfall, there had been no Dlecka about for hours. Grant and Cecilia carefully closed the doors and set the alarms—though there were no dangerous animals on the planet—and had a very cosy and

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domestic evening. It was actually their first evening together in a home of their own.

Grant ran off, for the first time, the cine of their marriage. And Cecilia was distressed when she saw that the tiny flower-girl had wiped her nose with the back of her hand at a very solemn part of the ceremony. But the lighting of the moment of the vows was excellent.

When the reel was finished, Cecilia felt a somehow awed and shaken realization of the permanence and the solemnity of marriage.

"I—I think," she said, her eyes wet, "I think that if I—if I had my life to live over again, Grant, I'd—I'd do the same thing I did!"

"Precious!" said Grant tenderly.

He bent over the chair where she sat.

There was a minor, chattering tumult under the floor.

It turned to squealings of wild panic when Grant realized that the Dlecka had quietly dug a tunnel after dark so they could get under the house and be happily close to the humans when they felt quite alone and were happiest in consequence.

Grant spent the rest of the night at hard labor out-of-doors. The entire glade was flood-lighted, and presently little groups of Dlecka came wistfully into view. When they realized what he was about, they tried to help him. They were intelligent little creatures. They labored valiantly at digging post-holes and stringing wires.

The trouble was that if Grant allowed himself to feel appreciative of their industry, they immediately stopped work to hang around close to him to enjoy the sensation of his pleasure. But on the other hand, when he was irritated they slipped away into the night. Most of the work was Grant's.

By daybreak, though, he had a wire fence completely around the honeymoon cottage. He went inside and grimly threw a switch. From that moment the fence was electrified. He saw Dlecka touch it and recoil, at once frightened and stung.

Cecilia was deeply sympathetic when he came inside, dirt-streaked and weary. She had a lovely breakfast ready for him, and she looked at him with warm proud eyes. She was proud because he hadn't given up his benign intentions toward the Dlecka even though they made him angry. The warmth and tenderness in her look, of course, was because he was himself and she was newly married to him.

But he fell asleep before he could finish the very first breakfast she had ever cooked for him in a home of their own.

Grant hadn't abandoned his altruism. He simply applied scientific reasoning to his purpose. He explained it to Cecilia.

"The trouble is with their sense of values," he said authoritatively. "They simply like to feel good.

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They don't know anything about the good feeling of achievement or having possessions. They haven't any appetite for accomplishment, because they don't know what it is. We never consciously want things we don't know about in some fashion."

Cecilia nodded admiringly. When Grant looked thoughtful, she considered him remarkably handsome. Just as handsome as at other times.

"I'll visit their village," said Grant. "I'll pick out some community necessity they've never known about. I'll lead them to its accomplishment. When it's done they'll feel good! Once give them the satisfaction of satisfied ambition, and they'll feel ambitious! They'll hunger for achievement! They'll head toward greatness!"

"Grant," said Cecilia sincerely, "there isn't anybody else in the world who'd think of anything as perfect as that!"

She made use of one of the privileges of the wife of the most remarkable man on a planet. She hugged her husband. He returned the embrace.

He howled with wrath.

But it wasn't really a loud cheer. It was muffled, as if the Dlecka had really tried to restrain their enthusiasm. But they'd slung a tree-trunk over the electrified fence, and very daringly had trotted across it to get close to the humans and share in their nice feelings when they were all alone. Under the circumstances it was natural for the Dlecka to feel pleased. In a very real sense, they had the satisfaction of achievement, too.

Next morning Cecilia got out her modeling materials with a pretty air of seriousness. There were, of course, some Dlecka hanging around outside the fence. Grant brought two of them inside the cottage. Via the tape-translator, he explained just what Cecilia wished them to do.

They watched with wide grins as Cecilia set up an armature of steel wire to mould the clay to. She spoke to them kindly and arranged their pose just so. They plainly did not understand at all, but they were enraptured to feel Cecilia's pleased — even affectionate — approval of them.

Grant said splendidly: "I'll go pick out a suitable community project."

He had been taught to think in terms like "community project."

He even classed community projects as self-liquidating and non-self-liquidating, and he believed innocently that there was a "norm of social consciousness" and an "optimum of self-sufficiency," and things like that. But he meant well.

He went off. Cecilia modeled her Dlecka. When she thought they might be tired, she stopped and had them rest. She chatted kindly with them. They listened ecstatically. Presently she was convinced that she had a husband and wife as models. Considering everything, she

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was not quite right, but she was charmed by their cute, affectionate manner to each other.

She worked again at the sculpture, and they took form in miniature in the clay. Presently they were not only Dlecka in clay, but very happy Dlecka in clay.

She couldn't wait to make her work look real. She splashed color on it. Green, mostly, with mottlings of lighter green shading to white. When the afternoon was half-gone, she let the two Dlecka look at their portraits.

They were fascinated beyond her fondest hoping. They gazed at it and wriggled with joy. She left the room and they moved about her work, making chattering observations to each other. When she returned, they had something to say. They had trouble explaining, but ultimately she let them carry the small masterpiece down to the wire fence for other Dlecka to see.

It was a sensation. Literally. Even to Cecilia the public response to her one-man show was astonishing. Grant, returning, had to force his way through a rapt and goggling crowd of art-critic Dlecka who pressed close to the modeled figures of two very happy members of their race.

He was disgruntled. "I think I'm beaten," he told Cecilia grimly, when he had her and the tiny statues back in the cottage. "They don't want anything! Their houses grow, and all they have to do is hollow them out! They carve holes in the walls to pluck fruit! Their beds are piles of stuff that look like fur, but are actually vegetable. They don't need a thing!

"And still they have brains! They reduce iron ore and make hooks and spears for fishing. They do some agriculture. But they simply don't want anything! Do you know, they've no art at all? Not even geometric decorations! Imagine an intelligent race without arts!"

It bothered him. Cecilia did not like to contradict him, but if the Dlecka did not have arts, they assuredly appreciated sculpture. She waited for a proper moment to say so. But Grant went on:

"That's the trouble! Humans practice arts so they can say things ordinary speech won't convey. Music does it. Painting does it. Even fiction is a way of saying something by described action which couldn't be said any other way. But the Dlecka don't need arts! They can share sensations that can't be spoken! They've no need of a technical culture because they have a completely satisfying emotional one!"

"Maybe," said Cecilia timidly, "maybe they just never thought of art. They liked my sculpture, crude as it was!"

Grant viewed the thought without enthusiasm. But it was that or nothing. Presently he said dubiously:

"You might try giving art-lessons to a few of them. That might give

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them a sense of achievement. If you can start them off that way, perhaps I can channel the new interest into really practical fields."

Cecilia looked at him adoringly. He patted her cheek. He kissed it.

He went charging out-of-doors, raging. The Dlecka were imaginative little creatures. They'd made a catapult to send daring devotees of shared tenderness flying through the air over the electrified fence. They broke through the fence in their panicked flight.

Repairing the fence, later, it occurred to Grant that on Dlecka even a pleasant dream might end with the dreamer wakened by the happy cheering of those who shared his sensations in it.

Cecilia started her art-class next morning. Grant brought in Dlecka and used the translator to explain to them. They trooped into the honeymoon-cottage in such numbers that there was not sculpture-material for all of them. He sent some off for clay. They came back with doughy gray stuff that worked nicely for modeling. And Cecilia instructed them.

Never had any teacher such worshipfully attentive pupils! Never was there such aptitude displayed! Never, never, never, did a brand-new art take such hold on any population as the art of sculpture did on Dlecka! And the Dlecka displayed surprising facility. Having been shown that naturalism was possible, they completely overleaped the primitive phase of art.

They made, from the beginning, statuettes which were practically portraits. Dlecka dancing. Dlecka eating. Dlecka carrying huge fish, their faces almost bisected by grins. There was one group on which half a dozen Dlecka collaborated. The center was a portrait of Grant and Cecilia embracing, surrounded by enraptured small green-and-white aborigines.

Grant was a trifle uneasy about that group, but Cecilia glowed with enthusiasm. He helped her instruct the Dlecka about keeping the clay moist until the sculpture was finished, and about colorings . . .

The art-class Dlecka went away in gleeful, clicking, chattering groups. The hangers-on beyond the fence went with them, excited and pleased.

They didn't come back.

Grant couldn't quite believe it. He spent the entire night turning on the outside glare-lights at odd moments and sneaking out to patrol the honeymoon-cottage grounds for intruders. He was so obsessed that he and Cecilia had no feeling of solitude at all.

But the next day they were also conspicuously left alone. And the next day. And the next.

On the fourth day when no single Dlecka had appeared, Grant went to the nearby village to inquire. And Cecilia heard the uproar. There was a tumult above the normal natural sounds of a Dleckian landscape. Presently dense clouds of smoke arose from something set

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afire. Cecilia heard Grant shouting. She thought she heard explosions.

Then Grant came back, so singed and so enraged that there was no trace of altruism left in him. When he tried to talk to Cecilia, he was incoherent. All she could understand was that he swore he would devote the rest of his life to the extermination of the entire race of Dlecka and the reduction of their planet to a desert.

Then he went to the communicator and—strangling—raised the Connor Line base on Quera. He demanded that the first available ship be routed past this planet to pick up two passengers—himself and Cecilia.

Then he had to explain to her.

It was perfectly simple. When the Dlecka saw the sculptured image of a happy Dlecka, they remembered what it was like to feel happy, so they felt it. Then others joined them and each one was happy because all the others were happy. Then there developed a magnificent ambition—to make a sculpture of a still happier Dlecka, for other Dlecka and himself to be made happy by. Of course they admired Grant and Cecilia enormously.

They'd shared in splendid bliss when Grant kissed Cecilia just after the cargo-ship lifted. Naturally, they imagined similar high-grade bliss should come from Grant and Cecilia fishing together, and dancing together. They modeled such happiness-inspiring scenes. Carrying a huge fish to their honeymoon cottage to be cooked for dinner. Holding hands . . .

"It has to be stopped!" howled Grant. "They model each other, and that's all right, but when they model us!"

So he'd burned their village and smashed their sculptures and done what damage he could, so that the Dlecka would never again think of them with any pleasure. And now he intended to take a hunting-rifle and make savagely sure that in future Dlecka legend—and sculpture—humans were represented as monsters, ogres, nightmares! He was going, he howled, to get to work right now.

Cecilia clung to him, pleading. She stopped him from a personal Dlecka-pogrom to be continued until the space-ship arrived to carry them away. She calmed him. She soothed his savage breast. He found that it was an interesting and pleasing experience to have his wife cajole him into reasonable behavior. He made a mental note of the fact.

So they left Dlecka. They locked up the cottage, in case somebody else might want to use it for scientific purposes, but they never passed along the fact of its existence and location. Tacitly, they preferred their honeymoon on Dlecka to be forgotten.

Grant almost forgot it, himself. He assumed that the Dlecka had forgotten him. But he was mistaken. They did forget his rage, of course. All the damage he'd done

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was easy to repair. But the art of sculpture was another matter.

About thirty years after—when Grant and Cecilia were very rich and conservative and on the boards of charities and museums and such things—Grant went to open an exhibition of aboriginal sculpture from a just-discovered artistic race out near Orron's left ear.

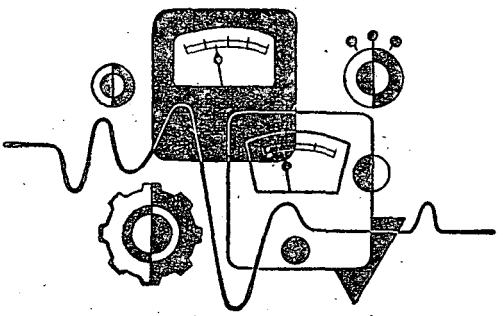
Grant went into the museum, all dignity and benign complacency. He prepared to make a speech. But he bellowed, instead. The newly-discovered art-works came from Dlecka.

Grant looked at the sculptures and turned purple. Cecilia and he were legendary figures, now, on Dlecka. They were symbols of happiness. They were pictured surrounded by happy Dlecka, in every possible pursuit which could lead to happiness and gracious living.

In thirty years, of course, their memories had become somewhat idealized. They looked just a soupcon Dleckian. They were even attired in the Dleckian manner. The sculptured figures were quite naturalized on Dlecka. But Grant almost burst a blood-vessel, and he did not make the speech opening the exhibit.

Luckily, the happy bride and groom whose memories the Dlecka treasured so enthusiastically had changed. Nobody ever thought that the male patron of happiness on Dlecka looked like Grant. Or, of course—

Considering everything, Grant and Cecilia felt that it was just as well they'd never told anybody any details about their honeymoon on Dlecka.



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coming generation

by . . . F. B. Bryning

A mutant strawberry may have a great deal in common with a mutant child. Both may be glorious!

"IT'S HARDLY an original thing to say," murmured Finch, "but mourning becomes the Director."

Hudson nodded slowly in agreement. They stood together, their backs to the plate-glass windows of the rooftop penthouse while Dr. Elizabeth Buckley, black-gowned, tall, and copper-haired, made a stately exit on her way to answer the outer door.

"Everything becomes the Director," confirmed Hudson, the light glinting on his spectacles and his blond cowlick as he and Finch turned again to the huge windows. "Evening dress, swim suit, laboratory tunic, field-worker's smock—she looks like a goddess in them all."

Finch's fine teeth gleamed against his sun-tanned skin as he smiled down over the broad acres of the experimental farmlands of the Arthur Buckley Plant Development Institute, six storeys below.

"Have you any idea, Hudson, why she called this Extraordinary Meeting?" he asked.

"Not the least," the other replied. "I was going to ask you."

"Something serious, but I can't

If we had the task of nominating the contemporary science-fiction writer most likely to succeed in dramatizing in thrilling documentary fashion the most awe-provoking aspect of the atomic age our choice would probably be F. B. Bryning. In this unforgettable portrayal of radiation mutation in the realm of human genetics Mr. Bryning has touched on a fear and a hope unique in our time and added another cubit to his stature as a writer.

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imagine what. Sudden emergencies at boardroom level don't happen in an Institute like this."

"Even when Arthur Buckley died no special meeting was called," agreed Hudson. "If that wasn't emergency enough, what could be?"

Finch shrugged. "It's something very recent. She's come to some sudden decision. There was no hint of anything a week ago, at the last board meeting."

Together they wheeled from the window as Elizabeth Buckley returned, followed by a plump, fatherly little man.

The introductions which ensued were courteous but just a little perfunctory. "Dr. James Finch, our Chief Plant Biologist, and Dr. Clarence Hudson, Chief Radiologist —Mr. Harold Jennings, the new Government Member of the Board."

When they had shaken hands she added: "Thank you all for coming so early, and at such short notice—especially as I have not given you my reason for calling this meeting."

"No trouble for Hudson or me, Elizabeth," said Finch. "We're always within call."

Under her smile the new Government Member of the Board expanded noticeably.

"I am sure Dr. Buckley has acted with complete discretion," he said gallantly, with the faintest of bows. "I am content to await any explanations at the proper time."

"Thank you, Mr. Jennings. I hope I shall not disappoint you—" She broke off at sight of a sudden change in his expression. "Is anything wrong?"

"I—I beg your pardon," apologized Jennings. "It's those big plums there, growing in a cluster just like—like *grapes!*"

"They *are* grapes."

"Grapes!" echoed Jennings, "As big as duck eggs!"

"We are rather proud of them. They're our latest product, now breeding true to type and undergoing mass propagation." She took up the fruit basket from the wide, knee-high window sill. "You must try them."

"'Peel yourself a grape,'" smirked Jennings as he carefully detached a single grape, with its stalk, from the bunch. "That's what the polite host will be saying soon. And it won't be the first time you people will have changed our speech forms as well as our fruits."

Dr. Buckley stared at him.

"I didn't know we had done that."

"Well, does anyone ask, nowadays, 'Will you have some strawberries?' No! It's always, 'Will you have *a* strawberry?' It would imply gluttony to suggest that anyone might eat more than one Buckley's Fist strawberry. And now you've done it again — with grapes!"

"Here's a plate," offered Hudson, grinning. He was beginning to like Jennings. "You'll find only

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one small pip. It'll come out on the stalk."

Jennings pulled the stalk out, and it was so. "A handy invention," he acknowledged, beaming at the pip.

Dr. Buckley glanced at the watch on her wrist. "Now if I may be excused, please. I have an appointment downstairs in my office with a magazine writer. Afternoon tea will be served here in a few minutes, and I'll be grateful if you will see that the others have some as they arrive. I'll be with you in the boardroom in half an hour."

Finch escorted her to the door. Returning, he found the other two standing silently, neither quite free yet from the effect of her presence.

Jennings, plate in one hand and grape in the other, spoke first. "I can understand now, I think, why everyone speaks with such admiration of Dr. Buckley," he said. "Her husband was a fortunate man."

"They made a perfect team," agreed Finch.

Hudson nodded. "She's the ideal helpmate—a beautiful and desirable wife and a scientist in her own right about equal to himself."

"It's a pity," added Jennings, "that there are no children."

Finch shot a keen, inquiring glance at Jennings, but it was Hudson who spoke.

"You know why, of course?" he asked.

"No. And I don't seek to, really. It was just a thoughtless remark."

"Do you know what Arthur Buckley died of?" asked Finch, quietly.

"Of course!" exclaimed Jennings. "Exposure to radio-active emissions. I hadn't thought of that. Any offspring would be—might be—?"

Finch shrugged. "The hazards are rather appalling for most people . . ."

ON THE desk between herself and the Director the girl reporter placed an electronic sound recorder, which in size and appearance bore a striking resemblance to a small camera.

"I think, perhaps, you people over-rate the importance of our personal story," Elizabeth Buckley was saying. "At least that has been my husband's view, and mine. And the work of the Institute since then is really more significant than the origin of the strawberry."

"No doubt you are right from the scientific viewpoint, Dr. Buckley," conceded the girl as she plugged into each side of the recorder a thin covered wire with a hand control at the end. "But because this Institute arose out of that first achievement we think the strawberry, and your own account of its origin, have a special interest. That is why we have sought the story for a long time." She smiled suddenly. "I may say I am greatly envied this assignment."

"I am glad for you, my dear," was the quick, warm reply. "However, may we leave it at this—that

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since my husband's death circumstances have caused me to agree that a first-hand version of the details should, perhaps, be on record?"

"Thank you, Dr. Buckley," said the girl, reaching to the center of the table to place her hand on the switch of the recorder. "Will you please tell the story in your own way? I wish to intrude as little as possible."

She pressed the switch, and from that moment, except when either woman chose to stop it with her hand control, the instrument listened with sensitive ears and recorded on a fine wire filament every sound in the room.

For a few seconds Dr. Elizabeth Buckley looked at the notes in her hand. Then she dropped them on the table.

"It is now fourteen years since my husband and I commenced our attempt to develop a really exceptional strawberry," she said. "We hoped to produce something as big as a passion-fruit, perhaps, and yet flavored like the small Alpine varieties of strawberry.

"Our method was that used so successfully by Luther Burbank. We first made a careful selection of strains with characteristics similar to those we wanted, then we crossed them to blend or accentuate those desired traits, if possible. From amongst the many thousands of offspring we would seek out the one or two plants whose fruit had qualities most nearly like those we wanted. All the other offspring—usually about ten thousand of them—would be destroyed, and we would breed again from the one or two plants we had selected.

"Of course most of the next generation would fail to show the improvements we wanted, but a few would—a few more out of the many thousands than in the first generation."

"And would you again destroy all those other ones, Dr. Buckley? Were they no use at all?"

"No use for our purpose. Wasteful as it may seem, again and again we would destroy the thousands which failed to improve on the elements we wanted and breed from one or two of those which did reproduce them best. Finally, after about twenty generations, we might expect to have bred the unwanted elements right out and have our new strain breeding true to itself."

"Would that mean twenty years' work?" asked the reporter.

"Not if you can produce two, or perhaps three generations in a year, as you can with many plants. Eight to twelve years was what we expected. At the end of six years we had a plant of great hardihood with a globular fruit rather larger than a golf ball. It was delicious in flavor, although the flesh was a trifle soft.

"That was in 1963, when the war scare occurred, and the Atomic Research Project took over this entire region, including our farm,

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My husband was mobilized for scientific work abroad, and I had to go into flax research.

"We made an arrangement that our strawberry plantings would not be disturbed needlessly, and I believe the atomic research people enjoyed the strawberries so much during their few years here that they even cultivated some of them. Then they had the explosion which ended their occupation of this district, and was really very fortunate for us."

"'Fortunate,' Dr. Buckley?"

"Yes, as you will see. It was not a real atomic explosion, of course, or there would have been a great catastrophe. But there was some breakdown in the water cooling system of their main reactor. The pile itself overheated and the cooling water turned to super-heated steam. It blew up. Fission products of various kinds, radio-active metal parts, and pieces of uranium partially transmuted to plutonium, were scattered over our strawberry gardens.

"This meant, of course, that in decontaminating the area the affected part of the crop had to be destroyed. They raked up all the affected vegetation—weeds, grass, shrubs, strawberry plants—into a long heap by the edge of the creek. And then another fortunate event occurred. Before this rubbish could be destroyed the rain came. It rained heavily for days. The creek flooded and swept the entire heap away."

Elizabeth Buckley rose from her chair and went to the window, beckoning to the girl. Stopping only to adjust the recorder to the wider range, the young reporter followed her.

"As you will know, they didn't rebuild the atomic reactor, and the entire Project was transferred from this district soon afterwards. When my husband returned from overseas we decided without hesitation to come back to our old farm to carry on our work. You can see it down there, just above the bend in the creek.

"Rather sentimentally, perhaps, we made our first visit a picnic—at the pool under those willows you can see about half a mile further down the creek. We had spent many happy days at that spot in the past . . ."

For a few moments she gazed wistfully down at the creek.

"Was it there," ventured the girl reporter, "that you—?"

"Yes, it was there, just a few yards back from the water's edge, that we found the strawberry," said Elizabeth Buckley. She smiled. "I almost trod on it.

"There was a group of five plants—four of them on runners stemming out from the mother plant. There was one ripe strawberry about the size of a teacup, with five or six others in various stages of development and ranging from the size of a walnut to that of a tennis ball. There were flowers, too, as large as poppies.

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"When I realized what it was I called excitedly to my husband, who was at the water's edge, rinsing the cups. He came charging through the bushes. I had to leap over the precious strawberries and push him aside. He was really startled, then.

" 'What is it?' he cried. 'A snake?'

"I took him by the hand. 'Just look,' I said."

After a few seconds Elizabeth Buckley turned from the window and resumed her seat at the desk.

"My husband camped that night within twenty yards of those strawberries. Before he went to bed he had a fence of wire-netting around them. Next day he carefully cultivated about them, cleared grass and weeds away, and rigged up a completely covered wire-netting enclosure to protect them from bird and beast.

"Shortly after finding it we had sampled the one ripe fruit. It had the same delicious flavor you know well by now, and the same firm, white flesh.

" 'Look at it,' my husband exclaimed when we had it on a plate, 'It's like a cluster of strawberries fused together—all knobbled and knuckled like my clenched fist, and just the same size!'

"It was from this first reference to the now well-known knuckled shape that we named it 'Buckley's Fist.' "

"Of course, Dr. Buckley," suggested the girl, "you had to do more than find it before the strawberry became available for general cultivation?"

"Naturally—but not so much as we expected. We knew we could build up a number of plants by just layering the runners from the parent plant and repeating the procedure over and over with runners from these new plants. But to get it breeding true to type through its *seeds* was our more important task.

"We prepared to do this at once by the old, proven methods of Burbank's. No more of the fruits were eaten that season. Every one was saved for seed. My husband guarded the patch like a watchdog. He pollenated the flowers, mulched and watered and tended the plants. He layered and potted every runner and forced these new plants along to bear fruit in our old glass-house at the farm. Meanwhile I arranged for our reoccupation of the farm and we moved back into the old house within a fortnight of our finding the wonder strawberry.

"Next season, in addition to about fifty plants all grown from runners and producing the new strawberry, we had nearly three thousand thriving seedlings. Hardly enough, really, to be sure the new variety would appear again amongst them. But we hoped . . .

"How we hoped! We knew that the following year we'd have more than enough seedlings to be confident of *some* bearing the new strawberries, but we didn't feel pa-

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tient about waiting that extra year.

"But when every one of our seedlings, without exception, produced the same large, fist-like strawberries, we were astounded—and, of course, wildly delighted. Here was the new variety breeding true to its new type in the first generation! It was already established. There would be no need for those years of selective breeding."

"Yet that was contrary to the principles you were working on, was it not?" asked the girl.

"It was unreasonable except on one theory," acknowledged Elizabeth Buckley. "But it had happened. We recognized then that we had a true mutant—a new variety born overnight, as it were."

"And what was the theory? What had caused such a complete change?"

"It was now fairly obvious that our wonder strawberry had grown from seed affected by radio-activity released by the bursting of the atomic reactor. The germplasm of that seed had been basically and permanently altered by its exposure to radio-active emissions. And by just the same process that atomic bombs at Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Bikini had produced all sorts of mutations in the subsequent generations of affected plants, animals, insects, fish—and human beings—in those regions. We could no longer doubt that this local minor atomic catastrophe had produced a startling mutation amongst our strawberries."

"And possibly other mutations, too?"

"Almost certainly. As soon as we realized that we searched further along the creek down which that heap of affected plants had been washed by the flood. We discovered a dozen or so self-sown strawberry plants and various weeds, some apparently normal, but some showing eccentric formations of fruit, foliage, mode of growth, and so on. There were a few very unusual strawberry flowers. Some were pale pink or pale blue. One flower was very tiny and grew in clusters like forget-me-nots, and one was like a miniature pompone dahlia. I wish that you could have seen it.

"We found one or two plants with poisonous-looking, purplish fruits, and one bristling, twisted little strawberry that looked more like a thistle burr than anything else. One or two had rough, hairy leaves and extra-hairy stalks. Another had runners that branched and burst into leaf but failed to strike roots. We saved a few for experiment but destroyed the others as we found them.

"What other curious misfits had been born in that radio-active explosion we could only guess. Poor, deformed things with irrational systems incapable of securing proper nourishment or employing it logically. Most of them doomed to die before they had begun to live. It was our extremely good fortune to have found the one super-straw-

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berry mutant—the wonder strawberry—ready-made for us."

"And it was from that time, Dr. Buckley, that you and your husband began to develop the methods of this Institute—the technique of creating mutations deliberately by means of X-rays or radio-active substances to short-cut the years of selective breeding?"

"Yes," smiled Elizabeth Buckley. "But it is not such a short cut as you might imagine. The problem is not just to produce mutations. The odds against a *desirable* mutation occurring amongst the endless number of sterile, useless, deformed, or even dangerous offspring are tremendous."

"Also, working with X-rays and radio-actives is dangerous into the bargain?" prompted the girl.

"It is," confirmed Elizabeth Buckley, gravely. "My husband died several weeks ago as a result."

"Oh, Dr. Buckley! Please forgive my—"

With a gesture Elizabeth Buckley silenced her. "Please don't upset yourself, my dear. I do not think with pain of my husband, but with pleasure—and pride. And his death is an essential part of the story of the strawberry, and of this Institute. Radio-actives are dangerous—and in two ways. Despite all precautions it is difficult to avoid exposure at some time or another during years of working with them.

"Some months ago my husband became severely irradiated, unknown to us or him, before a leakage in a particular shield was discovered. His death last month was a direct result of that exposure.

"The other danger is that the offspring of human parents, one of whom has been exposed to radio-activity, may be just as monstrously deformed or as queerly changed from the normal as any mammal, vegetable, or insect mutants. Such children might differ from the normal just as widely as the queer, frustrated strawberries we found and destroyed along the creek differed from the normal strawberry. It is for this reason that the proved exposure of one parent is now sufficient grounds, medically and legally, to justify prevention of a birth . . ."

"On the other hand," suggested the girl reporter, "just as one strawberry amongst thousands became your super-strawberry, so one amongst thousands of mutant humans might turn out to be a superhuman, and—"

Elizabeth Buckley triggered the control which blanked out the recorder. Then, apparently impatient with herself for having done so, she pressed the trigger again to resume the recording.

"It is possible," she agreed. "But it would be a very remote chance . . ."

IN THE boardroom a long and rather tense silence was broken by Dr. Clarence Hudson.

"I am sure," he said, "we are all agreed that if the Director has

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requested leave of absence at this time, then she should have it without question. It is only seven weeks since she undertook the Directorship on the death of Dr. Arthur Buckley, and she has taken no respite at all. She has mentioned health reasons, and it is clear that such reasons must, now or later, make leave imperative. Also I agree that those of us who work in the Institute should share the Director's responsibilities in the meantime. I, at least, am glad to do that.

"But what I don't understand, and I don't like, is this passage in the resolution employing the words 'in the event of Dr. Buckley's demise or permanent incapacity,' and which sets up the way everything is to run on, Institute fashion, as if she were *never* coming back! If that passage means anything at all it means that this whole matter is more serious for Dr. Buckley and for this Institute than we know—yet. I think we need to know more about why these quite dire possibilities are being contemplated."

He sat back, looked around at the ten other Board Members, and then at Dr. Elizabeth Buckley at the head of the table. She said nothing, but her eyes moved calmly from one to another, inviting further discussion.

"I agree with Dr. Hudson," said Finch, at last. "I think that's what has us all worried."

Around the table, as he glanced from right to left, came a series of nods.

"For myself," continued Finch, "I'll gladly shoulder whatever extra work I am capable of for the time being. But I don't hold myself out as a worthy permanent successor to either the late Arthur Buckley or Elizabeth Buckley as Director of this Institute—the role in which this resolution casts me 'in the event of the demise,' *et cetera,* of the present Director." Then he added with quiet earnestness: "We can not do without Dr. Buckley so easily. We should not agree to do so without further and more compelling reasons."

There was another long silence. One by one, after glancing at the others, each man turned towards Elizabeth Buckley.

Jennings, the Government Member, opened his mouth as if to speak, shut it again, and finally murmured: "It would seem, Dr. Buckley, that we need a further direction from the chair."

Elizabeth Buckley favored him with a faint smile. Taking up her hand control she squeezed the trigger and blanked out the recorder which, in the center of the boardroom table, had been taking the minutes of the meeting.

"Of course I must tell you more precisely my reasons, but I prefer that certain details do not go into the minutes unless you insist. I have left it until now because what I must explain is somewhat personal and—well, difficult for me."

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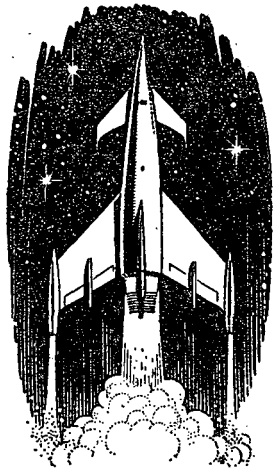
She raised her eyes briefly to the portrait of her husband which hung at the opposite end of the room. "You see, just before my husband died—just a few weeks before—I learned that I am going to have a child."

Once again there was a long, strained silence. Once again, Hudson was first to speak.

"I wish—I am sure we all wish, Dr. Buckley—that we could offer our felicitations. In the circumstances we can only wish you a speedy recovery and return to us. You may be away only a few weeks?"

"I am afraid, gentlemen, I shall need longer than that," replied Elizabeth Buckley. "I must confess I have become rather more of a gambler than a scientist. I have decided that the child shall be born."



The most remarkable of human patients
undergoes the most frightening of treatments
in the strangest case Dr. McEwen had ever seen

GRAND ROUNDS

By ALAN E. NOURSE

in the next FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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the egg and the professor

by . . . William A. Burns

Geraldine was worth more to the world of science than all the diamonds in Kimberley. But she just didn't know her own strength.

A THUNDEROUS wallowing disturbed the steaming quiet of a Jurassic swamp in Wyoming a hundred and fifty million years ago.

Tall tree ferns lashed back against a wave of mud-brown water that swept against their swollen bases, and, looming as large as ten elephants against a sulphur-yellow sky, Mrs. Brontosaurus ploshed solemnly on an important mission. Her seventy foot long bulk squashed the waving marsh grass flat and her enormous, clawed feet dug great post holes in the silt of the river bottom. Mrs. B. was looking for a suitable place to lay her eggs.

Overcoming the languorous torpor that usually engulfed her fifty ton dinosaurian length, she plowed along, bending the bankside grasses with her backwash. A vapor-clouded sun beat down on her lizard-green back, reflecting dully from the damp, pebbled grain of her hide.

As she plodded through the mud and water that reached to her ponderous belly, she snatched occasionally at some succulent green water plant, ground it to oozy pulp

When a distinguished and scholarly scientist with museum affiliations—Dr. Burns is Educational Research Assistant to the Director of the American Museum of Natural History—turns to science-fiction writing during his rare moments of truancy from tasks Herculean the welkins are sure to ring. Here is a story whose merits we are proud to extol, for William A. Burns has brought to the writing of it an accomplished and sparkling talent indeed.

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between her peg-like teeth, and turned her ridiculously small head from side to side, anxiously looking for a sun-warmed pile of rotting vegetation where she could deposit the clutch of eggs that swelled uncompromisingly in her cloaca.

Around a bend in the twisting snake of river that flowed in the great swamp, she found a location to her liking. Scrambling heavily up the bank, she scooped out a pocket in a heap of dead fern with her three-clawed hind legs. Like a turtle, she eased backwards over the hollow and laid her clutch of whitish-gray leathery eggs, each one flattened like the eggs of a modern black snake; each one larger than a football. Her eggs deposited for the sun and hot damp to hatch, she turned slowly, sweeping down ferns and grass with her long, whip-like tail, then slid over the bank into the tepid swamp water.

As she maneuvered into position, surrounded by brown froth beaten up by her broadside launching, a hoarse roar as of a hundred maddened bull-alligators echoed through the swamp. Before she could plunge for safety, Allosaurus, the great meat-eating dinosaur, was upon her, his powerful hind claws ripping through her back to the spine, his dagger teeth tearing out great gouts of bleeding flesh.

Mrs. Brontosaurus, a harmless plant-eater, had no defense against this dragon-like nightmare. She rolled in the reddening mud, lashing her tail helplessly while Allosaurus tore at her weakening hulk. As she threshed in her death agonies, her great mass struck the bank where her eggs lay nesting in rotting fronds and stems of fern.

The bank cracked a dozen feet from its edge, tipped slowly, and turned over, burying the clutch of eggs at the bottom of the swamp.

ABEL HINES, Ph.D., D.Sc., member of the Society of Eminent Palaeontologists and Honorary Curator of Vertebrate Palaeontology at the Columbian Museum, dropped his chisel, mopped his red brow with an equally red and moist bandana, wiped his steamed glasses and reached for the last bottle of warm beer.

"Snedrow," he said to his perspiring assistant, "July was never a month to dig dinosaurs in Como Bluff."

Snedrow regretfully watched the last drop of beer disappear down the Hines gullet and got out his canteen.

"It isn't every day we find a brontosaurus and an allosaurus within fifty feet of each other," he replied.

Abel dropped the bottle into a shopping bag from which stuck the necks of half a dozen others. Picking up his chisel, he pecked cautiously at the roughly outlined thigh bone of some tremendous creature embedded in the solid rock.

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"One more whack at it and we call it a day," he said, raising his hammer.

Suddenly the chisel bit through a fault in the hard rock, a chunk caved in, and Abel's hand, chisel and all, disappeared into a yawning hole.

Abel swore with un-curatorial proficiency. "If I ruined that bone, I'll take the next train back to Connecticut," he fumed.

Poking his hand far into the hole, he felt around, exploring with stubby but sensitive fingers.

"Something loose in here," he said to Snedrow, who stood by. "Something smooth and hard."

He withdrew his hand and chipped carefully, below the line of thigh bone above the opening. He reached in again and struggled with something too heavy to lift one-handed. Using both hands, he got a purchase and came out, holding something that seemed to be a large oval cobblestone. He placed it on the ground but it was too dark to see it plainly.

"Give me the flash, Snedrow," he asked.

Snedrow handed it over and Abel snapped a stabbing white ray into the half-darkness at his feet. Then he sat down suddenly and let the light roll from his nerveless hand.

"Dr. Snedrow," he gasped, "will you kindly pick up that light and examine the specimen?"

Snedrow leaped for the light and pointed it down in a crazy half-circle. Then he fixed it on a grayish pitted object, flattened like the egg of a modern blacksnake, but larger than a football.

"Dr. Hines!" Snedrow whinnied. "It's a—a—"

"Yes, by Harry!" roared Abel. "It's the only brontosaurus egg ever found. And you and I found it."

Snedrow leaned against the partially outlined thigh bone in the rock. "What'll we do?" he choked weakly.

"Do?" snorted Abel. "Do? We'll dig for more at once."

He seized the chisel, struggled to his feet and set to work. He rapped and hammered and pecked like a woodpecker gone berserk. Fragments of stone rattled like hail around him, bounced off his balding head, struck sparks from his steel-rimmed spectacles. Snedrow held the light with a trembling hand.

The hole grew. He tried to force his head into it and Snedrow had to pull him out. He rapped and tapped and mashed his short fingers but never stopped for a rest. At last, whatever thin layer of rock lay between him and the unknown, gave way and in an instant he was head-first into the hole with the flash. In a second he was out again.

"Snedrow," he exclaimed, "this is a most momentous occasion. Get out two bottles of beer."

"The beer is all gone," said Snedrow.

"Never mind, then. Snedrow, do

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you know that there are six more brontosaurus eggs in that hole? *Six more brontosaurus eggs* and not a one cracked!"

Snedrow allowed himself to betray emotion. He began to circle slowly around the fat little Abel, dancing like an ungainly shoe-bill stork. Abel regarded him gravely for a moment, then joined hands and the two danced around the egg on the ground. After a rapturous minute of this, they bumped heads in a simultaneous dive to retrieve the other six eggs.

When they returned to the base camp, all was excitement. The eggs held the spotlight on a folding table in Abel's wall tent. A gasoline lantern sputtered and cast a greenish glow on their marbled surfaces.

Abel sat with his wool-stockinged feet on the edge of the table. He called to Dr. Snedrow who sat as though in a trance, drinking in the actuality of brontosaurus eggs.

"Snedrow," he called. "You type better than I. How about getting out the portable and writing a telegram for me?"

He lighted his pipe while Snedrow unlimbered the typewriter. When he was seated, his sunburned and knotted fingers poised above the keys, Abel gave him the message, punctuated by waves of his pipe.

"To the Society of Eminent Palaeontologists, Columbian Museum, et cetera, et cetera—you know the address."

"Shall I spell 'palaeontologist,' 'palontologist,' without the 'ae'?" Snedrow broke in.

"What do you mean, 'without the ae'?" snorted Abel. "You youngsters are all alike, economizing in the wrong direction. With the 'ae,' of course. Now, where was I? Oh, yes. Fellow Palaeontologists, I have the honor to announce the discovery at the Como Bluffs site, late this afternoon, of seven brontosaurus eggs. Returning at once with eggs. Snedrow carries on removal of specimens already uncovered. Sign it 'Hines.' No. Sign it 'Abel Hines.' No, sign it 'Abel Sweetwater Hines.' That'll hold 'em!"

"It ought to!" Snedrow agreed.

When Abel stepped off the train in the terminal, he was greeted by a reception committee from the Museum. The Director grasped him by the hand.

"Dr. Hines," he boomed, "we are proud of you. This is a most auspicious and happy moment for the Museum, not to mention the Eminent Society."

Abel beamed.

The Director took him by the arm and they pushed through the crowd, followed by the committee. Behind them, a porter wheeled a crate labelled FRAGILE—USE NO HOOKS. On the way to the Museum, Abel craned his neck to make sure that the truck belonging to the Department of Vertebrate Palaeontology did not get lost in the traffic. When they arrived at the Museum,

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another delegation of applauding staff members met them.

Abel wiped what might have been a tear from his bright blue eye.

In his office on the fifth floor, they opened the crate carefully and he lifted the precious eggs, one by one, onto a mahogany table. First the President, then the Director, then the rest of the Departments examined the eggs with almost religious awe. A holiday was declared for the rest of the Museum and all day long a steady procession streamed through the office to see the first brontosaurus eggs ever uncovered.

At the day's end, when the last flash bulb had gone off and the final reporter's question answered, Abel found his way to the Director's office.

"Joe," he said, "I need a rest after all of this excitement. I'm going to take one of the eggs up to my Pear Tree Harbor place and relax with it. I might even go flounder fishing."

"Abel, old man," smiled the Director, "you earned it. Go to it."

Abel found his way back to his office and again stood before the eggs on the long red table. One of them drew his closer attention and he examined it thoroughly. It was a little whiter, not quite so gray as the other six. He patted it, lifted it with both hands and took it into his office to wrap it for transportation to his Connecticut shore bungalow.

As the train wound around Long Island Sound, he fondled the huge egg through its wrapping. To make sure it would not have to ride on the overhead rack, he had purchased two tickets, one for the egg and another for himself. The conductor raised his eyebrows when he saw two tickets and one occupant.

"Gone for a drink," smiled Abel, patting the egg.

At Larchmont a cranky-looking woman glared at the seat and pointed at the egg.

"Men's room," remarked the cherubic Eminent Palaeontologist. She fled.

His chauffeur met him at the station and they rumbled out to his summer retreat. Pear Tree Harbor was nothing more than an inlet, grown about with marsh grass. The name of Pear Tree Harbor must have been the invention of a resourceful real estate agent, for not a tree grew within miles. The bungalow was cool and white and green and Abel had spent many a quiet summer there.

His housekeeper, Bridget McBride, met him at the door, her fine Hibernian face flushed with joy. She had been reading about "her professor" in the late city papers.

"Welcome home," she said, trying to wrest the packaged egg from Abel's hands. "I'll fix you a pot of tea and some sandwiches."

Abel hugged the egg to him and carried it to the table in his living

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room. While Bridget fixed the tea, he unwrapped it and set it before him. Bridget came in with a tray, looked at the egg on the table, set the tray down on a bookcase and removed the egg to a window box planted with ivy and geraniums. Then she served the weary Abel his tea. He spent a long time at it, sipping and drowsing and forgetting to chew. Finally he gave up.

"Bridget," he called, pulling himself out of his comfortable Morris chair, "I'm going right to bed. Wake me early."

In the morning, just as he had poured himself a second cup of the McBride coffee, a telegram came. He tore it open and puffed violently on his pipe.

"Confound it, Bridget," he said, "I never yet tried to take a vacation without something like this coming up."

"What's the matter, Professor?" asked Mrs. McBride, wiping her hands on her apron.

"It's that confounded bibliography of special papers on fossil invertebrates I promised to edit," he moaned. "I'll be gone a month at least."

"Ah, that's too bad now, Professor," mourned Mrs. McBride. "I'll make you a bit of lunch to take on the train with you."

In an hour he was gone, still muttering under his breath and clutching the bundle of lunch.

The month went by and Mrs. McBride went about her housekeeping, sweeping here and polishing there and watering the plants that were her special pride and joy. The window box, with its geraniums and ivy, were to her what a developing child is to a fond mother. She moistened it and pruned its seldom-yellow leaves and attacked red spiders and scale insects with an Hibernian anger worthy of a second Battle of the Boyne.

Abel, knowing her love for her green children, bought her a long-nosed copper watering can. He might as well have bought her pearls of great price. This can was to her the visible manifestation of her priesthood over her plants. She polished the copper until it shone like gold. When she filled it every morning at the cold water tap, its bright red metal changed to a rosy frosted satin.

On the morning Abel had gone back to the city, she went to the window box, copper chalice in hand. She noticed with alarm that, in her haste to clear the tea table, she had put the egg in the window box. She was about to remove it when something about the contrast of leathery gray-white and the bright green of leaf and red of blossom caught her Irish eye.

"Sure, it's a handsome rock," she muttered. "I'll leave it in the corner of the box and slip some of that ivy over it."

She carefully lifted some of the ivy that grew over the side of the box and trained it over the egg. Then she got the copper can from

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the chair where she had placed it and sprinkled the whole box, moaning a wild melody of happiness over her arrangement.

For a month the sun rose every morning and filled the box with pushing green life. The geraniums grew redder and more luxuriant. The ivy prospered and sent exploring tendrils over the egg. Warm sun and rich earth, day after long summer day, with the splash of cool water dropping on the egg. The month passed and Abel returned, the editorial job finished.

"Mrs. McBride," he said, sitting in his Morris chair, "answer no phones, receive no telegrams. I'm spending the rest of the summer resting."

After lunch he remembered what he had intended to do a month before.

"Bridget," he asked, "where is my leather apron, my saw, my drills, my chisel?"

"What are you going to build, Professor?" inquired Mrs. McBride.

"My reputation," laughed Abel. "I'm going to cut open the dinosaur egg that's in the window box."

"Dinosaur egg, is it?" said Mrs. McBride. "Sure, I thought it was a rock entirely."

"Egg it is, my good woman," said Abel, "and I have the Director's approval to cut it open and see what's inside. Maybe I'll find a brontosaurus embryo."

Mrs. McBride bridled. When the "Professor" used long words, she felt excluded from the conversation.

"I don't hold with that foreign nonsense," she sniffed, and left to find the apron and the tools. When she came back with them, Abel had the egg on his desk. He donned the apron and hefted the chisel in his hand.

For a time, he studied the egg as a diamond cutter might study an uncut stone, figuring out cleavages and planes. He peered at it with his snub nose an inch away. He tapped it with the point of the chisel. To his surprise, instead of a sharp click, the egg gave off a dull sound, something like the noise a pencil point would make on a wet drumhead. He tapped again. The noise was the same.

He tapped a third time, then bent his head down so that his ear lay against the side of the egg. Immediately he jerked back as though a snake had struck at him. Then he bent low again.

There could be no doubt! His ears did not deceive him. Inside the egg, he could hear a distinct scraping sound as though *something alive* were sawing, rubbing, trying to get out.

He sat as though turned to Triassic stone. He grew as white as Cretaceous chalk. For half an hour he sat while the tiny sawing and rubbing and scraping assailed his almost unbelieving ears. Out in the kitchen Mrs. McBride keened a melancholy musical background while cutting up chicken for supper.

All at once, Abel clawed for his

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notebook and pencil, and without taking his eyes off the egg, he recorded in frantic hen-tracks the event that was taking place before his astounded eyes.

A little rostral, or egg-cutting beak, pierced the tough leathery shell. Abel's hair stood on end but he scribbled furiously. The beak sawed back and forth, the slit growing wider and wider. Abel wrote without removing his fixed gaze.

Then, with a sudden thrust, a goggly little head poked through the slit and fixed Abel with its little black eyes. The green little head pushed frantically at the opening, tore it some more, and out crawled a brand-new baby brontosaurus, about eleven inches long and already one hundred and fifty million years old. Abel's pencil stopped writing and rolled off the desk to the floor.

When Mrs. McBride came in to see what the "Professor" would have to drink with his lunch, she found him babbling idiotically and pointing at something that meant "lizard" to her meager knowledge of reptiles. She screamed and ran out of the room, returning with the kitchen broom.

"Don't move, Professor dear, I'll save you. Don't move," she yelled.

And she swept violently at the new-born baby. Abel recovered the use of his limbs and almost tackled her to the floor in the endeavor to take the broom out of her hands.

"Don't touch it, don't touch it," he screamed. "It's the only living brontosaurus man has ever seen. You and I are the only man and woman in the world who have ever beheld this sight."

"It's horrible-lookin', r i g h t enough," shuddered Mrs. McBride.

"It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," said Abel. "Call the Museum. Call the newspapers . . . No! Don't. I want to keep this a secret until I see if it will live."

Abel ate nothing for the rest of the day. He observed, measured, sketched, photographed, got out his home movie camera and shot all the film he had of the podosaurian arrival.

He took a magnifying glass and studied the tiny animal's skin and found it to be a fine network of pebbled texture, something like that of a modern lizard. He noted this and the fact that it had beady round little black pupils in a clear yellow eye. There was something humorous about the expression in that eye, something that said, *"Well, here I am. What are you going to do about me?"*

There was something potential, something kinetic, about that expression. The genie in the bottle must have worn the same expression through the glass, just before he was uncorked.

While Abel was studying his find, the baby decided that it was time for nourishment. It sidled over to the window box, staggering a bit as if it were not used to solid ground, then nibbled tentatively on

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a leaf of spearmint in a pot on the sill. It spat it out.

"Too strong, eh?" commented Abel.

The black eye winked.

Then it tried the ivy that trailed over the edge of the box. This pleased it and it finished the plant down to the root. As it cut a geranium leaf off, Mrs. McBride moaned in anguish from the kitchen door.

Overnight, he kept the baby in the bath tub, plugging the drain to prevent accidents. In the morning, after a relatively sleepless night, he rushed down to the inlet and gathered the most delicate blades of salt grass. On the way back to the house he pulled some transplanted fern. When he presented them to the baby, it ate every bit and winked for more.

The next days were spent in finding a suitable diet. Marsh grass, fern, the delicate pith of reeds, ordinary grass shoots, tender tree leaves from miles away, carrot tops from the garden and spinach were eagerly devoured. Mint, wild garlic, leeks, chives or any strongly flavored herb were quickly spat out with a derisive wink of the black eye. Geranium leaves were dessert and Mrs. McBride suffered as Abel snapped them off and offered them.

She was finally won over and she spent her spare time in experimenting with Baby's formula. She added lettuce, pulped bananas and thinly sliced apple. One day, while feeding it some scraped celery, she glanced shyly at the "Professor."

"What are we goin' to name it?" she asked.

"It has a name—brontosaurus," said Abel.

"Sure, that's no name for a tiny creature like itself," objected Mrs. McBride. "We must give it a regular name, a pet name."

"Well," mused Abel, "it ought to have a descriptive name. Let's see. Brontosaurus means 'thunder lizard.' Stegosaurus means 'plated lizard.' An anklyosaur is a—"

"Bother those outlandish names!" cried Bridget. "Let's name it something cute."

"Cute?" echoed Abel. "It was a Jurassic dinosaur. Maybe we can put Jurassic and dinosaur together and get a name. Uh—Jurasaur? No. Perhaps Juradine?"

Mrs. McBride misunderstood.

"Geraldine!" she exclaimed in delight. "That's it. Let's call her Geraldine." And Geraldine it was, from that day forth.

Came Spring and Geraldine was too large for the bedroom. She was now sixteen feet long, mostly neck and tail, but she had a hard time of it adjusting her size to the twelve by twelve space. But she was patient and stood or reclined without protest, eating and growing by the hour.

At last Abel felt that he could reveal his world-shaking secret to the Museum Director, then to everybody. He invited Dr. Thomas to spend the weekend with him.

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On the way to Pear Tree Harbor, Abel almost burst with suppressed excitement but would not give anything away until the proper time. He had intended to show Dr. Thomas the broken egg fragments, then slowly, very slowly, lead up to Geraldine herself.

But he had not reckoned with Geraldine, who had not seen him for two weeks. When he and Dr. Thomas reached the path leading to the bungalow, Geraldine saw him and in an excess of affection, she backed out of the bedroom—taking wall, lath, plaster, clapboard and all. As Abel and the Director walked up the path, a sixteen-foot dinosaur waddled rapidly down to meet them and thrust her snaky head lovingly under her master's arm.

"Bridget!" bellowed Abel. "Get the brandy!" And picked the limp form of Dr. Thomas off the gravel.

That afternoon Abel's fence was trampled down. The ground was covered with a heavy three-inch snowfall of burned-out flashlight bulbs. Newspaper syndicates bought Quonset huts and set up semi-permanent headquarters near the half-wrecked bungalow. The Columbian Museum also bought a Quonset hut for Geraldine. It was forty-eight feet long and twenty feet wide and the United States Army sent a guard of honor to protect her, night and day, from over-enthusiastic crowds.

Abel was famous. He lunched with the President of the United States. He was decorated by all of the United Nations countries but one. It was jealous and sent out an expedition to try to find live mammoths in Siberia.

He signed contracts for Geraldine Toys and turned the profits over to the Museum, taking it out of the "red" for the first time in fifty years. He endorsed feed, hay, Quonset huts, signed thousands of autograph books, appeared on "We, the People," "What is It," and "What's My Name?"

The initial excitement died down to a mild panic that continued throughout the summer. Geraldine was not at all affected by the attention she got. She consumed great quantities of food and grew and grew.

Once in a while, she and Abel were lucky enough to get away from it all. He loved to swim in the Sound and she went with him. It was a lovely sight to see the two of them together. When he swam out too far, he hung on to her long tail and she pulled him back to the placid little beach.

She was now in the prime of her youth. She was seventy-two feet from her nostrils to the tip of her tail. Army engineers estimated that she weighed close to forty tons. In spite of her length, she found the Quonset hut perfectly comfortable because most of her length lay in her long neck and tail.

Abel was supremely happy. He was inordinately proud of the fact that he, Abel Sweetwater Hines,

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the son of a small-town druggist, had found and raised the only living dinosaur known to man.

In addition, he loved Geraldine as though she were his child, and she, in turn, loved him. Childless, he found in this forty-ton monster the affection he might have given and returned had he had a daughter.

So life went happily and smoothly for Abel until one day he thought Geraldine looked a little peaked. She had twice refused carrots for dessert, merely thrusting her great head under his arm, and hiding her eyes.

Abel was worried. There was nobody he could call if she fell ill. After all, he knew more about living dinosaurs than did anybody else in the world. Panic overcame him. What if she should die?

He began to study her closely. One day a significant thing happened, an event that shook him to the core. He was walking with her past a new housing development, to be known as Geraldine Mews. They were digging foundations with a steam shovel, the kind with a long neck and gaping jaws.

Geraldine's eyes brightened when she saw it. She started for the shovel. When she reached it, she nuzzled it, frightening the operator almost out of his wits. He swung the shovel around and bopped Geraldine on the snout. When she returned to Abel's side, he thought he could detect a tear in each reptilian eye.

Now he realized the horrible truth. *Geraldine was in love!* And nobody to fall in love with. In love, and the only living dinosaur in the world! Abel was aghast at the possibilities that presented themselves.

The shovel incident seemed to be the turning point in Geraldine's career. She failed rapidly. Her ribs showed through her pebbled hide like those of an unfinished wooden ship. The Engineers estimated that she weighed only thirty tons.

Abel consulted with the Museum.

"Joe," he said, in the Director's office, "frankly, I'm worried sick. We must do something."

"Why not put a Komodo lizard in with her?" volunteered Dr. Thomas. "At least, it's the same general family and might make her feel better."

"Might hurt her. Bloodthirsty beasts, those Komodo lizards," said Abel.

The meeting ended on a hopeless note except for the agreement that were Geraldine to die, her body, bones and all, would go to the Columbian Museum for mounting.

Publicity was given to Geraldine's affliction. Hollywood took an interest and Abel was persuaded to permit the great film companies to make a life-sized model of a brontosaurus. The purpose was to take her mind off herself.

On the day she was to meet her papier mache facsimile, there were dozens of camera men focussing

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on the field where the artificial dinosaur had been set up. It was a pretty good job, coloring and all. It had machinery inside that made the tail swing and the head wag from side to side. It even had a compressed air outlet in the nostrils so that it could hiss with apparent enjoyment at the sight of Geraldine.

Abel tied a piece of rope around her neck and led her to the field. As with the steam shovel, her eyes became bright. She broke into a run, dragging Abel for a while at the end of the rope. Then he let go as she trampled down a fence. When she reached the wretched imitation she sniffed at it, swung her great tail and smashed it into unrecognizable pulp. Then she charged the movie men who were shooting the scene.

Abel shouted and she turned and came to him, looking reproachfully at him.

She now refused to eat at all.

That night, Abel came to a desperate resolve. He asked himself, "What does a cowboy do when his beloved horse breaks a leg?"

But the thought of asking the Army to train a 40 mm. gun or even a guided missile on Geraldine was too bitter to contemplate. He spent the rest of the night thinking and in the morning his mind was made up. After a breakfast of coffee, he took the station wagon to the nearest Sound port and spent the day in conference on the waterfront.

The following evening a hoarse whistle blew three times in Pear Tree Harbor. Abel rose heavily from the table and went down to the Quonset hut.

"I'm taking Geraldine for a swim. Might do her some good," he explained to the guard.

He led her to the beach, got into his rowboat and stroked out to a waiting tug, Geraldine cruising in his wake. Aboard, he found Geraldine's snake-like neck and head had followed him over the rail. As she nuzzled him, he passed a stout hawser around her neck. Then he climbed into his boat and bade goodbye to Geraldine with his eyes streaming. He rowed in blind circles unitl he could see well enough to make his way back to the beach.

When he got home, Mrs. McBride looked sorrowfully at him.

"I couldn't help it, Bridget," he cried, "I had to do it for her own good. I couldn't watch her waste away to nothing and I couldn't have her shot. They'll tow her out past Block Island for about twelve miles, cut her loose and that'll be the end of her."

Mrs. Bridget McBride went sobbing off to bed.

For the next two days, Abel could think of nothing but Geraldine. Geraldine, swimming aimlessly in the cold ocean, being tossed by the waves night and day, getting weaker and weaker until the end came. Then, the sharks.

He sat by the window box, seeing in his mind's eye the egg as

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it had lain there, with the ivy growing over it. He could see the Baby Geraldine, eleven inches long, winking her black eye when she first tasted geranium leaves. He put his head down on the white-painted edge of the window box to cool his forehead.

Somewhere a storm must be brewing, he thought, for he could hear thunder rumbling in the sky. Or somebody, with a heavy truck, must be tooling along the shore road with a load of loose lumber. Must be getting close, from the sound of it.

Then the entire window, sash, glass and all, was carried away in a terrific smash and there was Geraldine's ugly head coming in through the space where the window used to be. Geraldine, back from the sea!

The wild-eyed Bridget came running downstairs in her nightgown. When she saw Geraldine, she threw her arms about the long neck and in a quick mad gesture tore out all the geraniums and ivy in the box and stuffed them into Geraldine's mouth.

There was wild rejoicing in the Hines household. Abel scurried about, rounding up all the carrots he could find and Geraldine ate them and winked for more. Festivities were at their height when Dr. Snedrow burst into the house without knocking.

"Abel!" he shouted, using the Eminent Palaeontologist's first name in his excitement.

"Sned, control yourself," said Abel, "Geraldine is back. She swam all the way from Montauk to Pear Tree Harbor."

"I know, I know. But we have made another great discovery at Como Bluffs."

Dr. Hines went white, as Cretaceous chalk, perhaps.

"You mean—?" he faltered.

"Yes," triumphantly announced Snedrow. "We have found another clutch of brontosaurus eggs."

"Are they all, you know, like the other six?" trembled Abel.

"Two, just two, are whitish-gray and leathery, like the one Geraldine was hatched from."

Abel permitted himself to betray emotion. He seized his brother Eminent Palaeontologist and together they circled the living room in a slow waltz.

A week later, Geraldine was back on her feed, gaining weight rapidly. Abel sat in the repaired window with the copper watering can in his hand. He appeared to be watching something. Every once in a while, he tipped the can and poured a little water over two objects in the window box.

They were grayish-white, leathery, flattened like the eggs of a modern black snake. Each was larger than a football. After watering them, Abel crossed to the windowless wall where a big commercial calendar hung. He took a stub of red pencil from his pocket and checked off another day.

Three more weeks to go!

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as a viking should

by . . . Sam Carson

They had a scientific task to perform—harsh and exacting. What right had they to be star-crossed lovers in the Mighty Dark?

FOUR DETERMINED individuals drove the Pra far beyond the Galactic axis, where the light from Antares was a pinpoint on the telescreen and the Magellanic Cloud a mere trace. The Pra was small, as survey ships went. Small—but self-sufficient for a century.

The Pra needed no crewmen. All the *knowhow* of centuries had gone into her construction. No set of robots staffed the Pra for she was built to take care of herself, even to the assimilation of required elements for a carbohydrate planetoid, which the ship could pick up in favorable sun systems.

Dal Erik, the first officer, led the three other members of the expedition into the shower room, as he did once a day. Dal and Flemin Ord, the engineer, were men. The two others were women. San Lagan, astrogator, was a titian-haired, six footer with a figure worth turning around and following, at least with one's eyes. Kee Durban was a brunette, with a doll-like shape and large dark eyes which seemed always to prefer a good joke to a philosophical discussion.

They showered as four persons

When the first Viking stood at the prow of the first Norse ship did a woman stand at his side? Did he pause to admire the strange bright wonder of her? Or did he keep his eyes on the sea, a slave to duty and ancestral pride? And just how much would a far tomorrow alter the behavior of a Viking? An amazingly imaginative story this, penned with skill and vigor.

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might on Earth, jets of warm water sluicing off their white bodies. But none of the precious fluid was wasted. Pra took care of that, and made sure that a blast of air would garner the remaining moisture, add it to the drainage, and carry it from there to the still.

Incredibly wise was the Pra.

Dal Erik shared in the joyous banter and good fellowship. It was nice to relax from the regimentation they shared, thousands of light years from the Mother Ship. Dal and the other three were splendidly conditioned, hairless beings, dedicated from birth to a lifetime of service in Earth Federation's far-flung empire.

Each had been psycho-conditioned to sex as a matter of artificial ritual. And the mental blocks had been planted by technicians with centuries of experience behind them.

Dal was sternly self-disciplined, yet in many ways he differed from the others. Like Flemin and the two females, he was a limited esper, and the knowledge that a limited esper could not be a free thinker caused him to be a lonely man. San, he liked very much. And now as he slipped into thin plastic coveralls, she smiled at him.

"I wish I could understand your worries, Chief," San said.

Kee turned her pert face toward the first officer. "Next time we cut out of hyper, give me time to record that reverse motion cluster in G-Nineteen sector."

"We may do that right away," Dal said, frowning. "Mother Ship scheduled contact through the relay ships every eight hours. We're twelve hours overdue now."

San laughed, gathering the upper part of her coveralls over her shapely bosom. "Dal's dreaming about his Vikings again, Kee. He'd like to be skipper on his own." She grew sober. "Seriously speaking, Dal, maybe we'd better contact the Milo. She's the nearest ship."

Flemin agreed. "Let's cut out of hyper and fire an accello beam."

Dal shook his head. "Not yet. You fire accello beams in cases of dire emergency only, Flemin."

Flemin Ord shook his head. He was a thin, solemn-visaged person, and the oldest officer. Dal was the newest, but it was typical of the present generation that Flemin held no resentment against the first officer.

"We're ten parsecs from the Milo, and twenty from the Sync," Flemin said. "And it's a thousand parsecs back to the Mother Ship. Dal, I checked the record tapes. Do you realize that the Pra can go twenty more years on our stock of supplies."

"Of course," Dal said. "We're on a six year voyage. That leaves us a fourteen year margin."

"I was going to add," Flemin put in softly, "that one item isn't included."

Kee and San joined Dal in staring at Flemin. "There are signs of

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deterioration in the Pra's brain," Flemin told them.

"What!" Three voices exclaimed as one.

"Why, everything's functioning perfectly," Kee protested. "There's no lag in a single function, not a single recording on the checking tapes."

"Why do you say that?" Dal asked. "Any evidence?"

Flemin nodded. "The memory banks are sound, true. But in the last six days Reflex Channels One, Two and Nine have switched relays, Nine as high as five times."

Dal whistled. "Pretty bad, but how did the self-repair units do?"

"That is the worst feature, Dal," Flemin said. "The Pra isn't repairing her disabled units. She's throwing a tremendous strain on the auxiliaries. If they go out from overload, auxiliary by auxiliary, we're going to stay out here, somewhere across the Galaxy from home."

Dal and the others examined the damning evidence. The tape records told the story of a tragedy so startling and unexpected that Flemin could only shake his head in despair.

He went to his library. So did Kee and San. Dal let them go, for he wanted to think alone.

The others sought an answer in the countless texts prepared by the Mother Ship. And Dal knew what they would do next, for there was no provision for dealing with the Pra's brain. It was constructed to outlast even the ship's hull, and its delicate machines. Dal wondered if Director Mersch on Mother Ship had the answer for their problem.

How long would the Pra's brain hold out? And what would happen if it failed? Dal tightened his lips in bitter frustration. What would a Viking do? He spoke aloud. "He'd try something, at least."

Hitherto no one in authority had dared send an exploring party as far as the heart of the Galaxy, and the Pra was actually attempting a voyage to the distant perimeter. It was man's supreme bid for a stellar triumph that would outlast his own passing.

Dal thought of his training days, at the Vegan Institute, and of the journeys aboard the Mother Ship toward the bright Star Algol, when all officers of the ten survey ships had been indoctrinated and then placed in service as a unit. Invariably half had been women. Psychoblocks, reinforced through formative years, held normal sex impulses in abeyance.

That is, between men and women in the flesh. Every ship had its illusionary partner mating room, one for the men, another for the women. The skill of master neurotechnicians went into the equipping of these mating rooms. And use of them was moderate, and respected by others—in silence.

As he pondered, Kee went past, flashing him a quick smile. She entered her mating room. Presently Flemin followed suit, entering his.

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Nervous tension, Dal thought. They'd return presently, sobered, concentrating upon a problem they feared.

San came in slowly, regarding Dal thoughtfully. She put a hand on his shoulder and a tingling, in defiance of all blocks, raced through his body.

"Kee and Flemin won't find an answer to this break in schedule, will they Dal?" San asked.

He shook his head.

"But Mother Ship has made no mistakes in all the years since the Galactic survey was instituted."

"Nevertheless, something is wrong. Wrong with the Pra's brain —and with communications." He glanced at the chronometer on the instrument board. "I'm waiting sixty minutes longer. If no message comes we're breaking out of hyper and I'll fire an accello beam."

"But there are no instructions, Dal. What if none come and we—"

Dal jerked a thumb toward the mating rooms. "Do you know why they took refuge there, San? Because of tension, yes. And it proves we're still human, like our ancestors of thousands of years ago. They're trying to forget, in an ecstasy of seconds."

San took a bench, extending her slender but shapely legs. She sighed. "The same idea occurred to me, Dal. So that I could be exhausted, and then overcome my imbalance. In Rules of Conduct—"

Dal lifted his face. Suddenly he was grinning. "In time we may forget Rules of Conduct, San." He broke off, for signal lights were flashing.

Dal leaped forward, spun dials. Then as a thready voice sounded, Flemin and Kee came rushing from their refuges.

"Super nova . . . all beams . . . Mother Ship vaporized . . . we are turning back . . ."

Then sounded the strident space distress call, going out on the accello beams which would build up speed in hyperspace and reach Earth itself. The weak voice faded. Space static alone kept speakers alive.

Flemin and Kee began a methodical sweep of black space, seeking to locate the Milo. But the next ship in line, itself so many parsecs away, was sending out no beams. The Milo had turned tail just in time. And so, as the seconds ticked away, the four aboard the Pra become fully aware of the seriousness of their plight.

"Let's turn," Kee said in a weak voice.

Flemin's eyes were haggard. "How? The Milo's brain is intact. She proved that by turning automatically. We—haven't changed course."

San spoke just one word softly, a barely audible: "Oh."

"Dal, is it true?" Kee demanded. "Isn't there some way we can—" She broke off, looked at him in desperate appeal, and then cried out despairfully, "They told us the

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brain would outlast us, and the ship. Why did they lie to us?"

Flemin buried his face in his hands. "I don't know what to do," he said slowly.

Dal rose. "We'll try things they didn't teach us," he said briefly. "We'll begin with the most obvious. Cutting out of hyper is a manual job. Let's cut."

They were in a strange sector, with a bright star directly ahead, larger by parallax measurements than Betelgeuse. There was a cluster, larger and brighter than any charted in the near side of the Galaxy. There were red dwarfs, cepheids, binaries, a paradise for chart technicians. And back toward the axis of the Galaxy, through which the Pra had raced, was a nova—a super nova still expanding.

In the observation room Dal beckoned to the others. "That is the funeral pyre of the Mother Ship," he said quietly.

"And the end of us," Flemin whispered, his face as grim as death.

Kee wept, while Flemin patted her shoulder. "We'll go through the micro library," he said consolingly. "We'll find that somewhere Mother Ship foresaw this tragedy and made provision for it. We may even find what to do about the Pra's brain."

Dal let them go without comment. San remained, her lips set in tight, despairing lines. San knew, Dal thought. She knew that the Pra's brain had an area of weakness that might give at any time. And that fallible area embraced the control of the ship's course. In hyperspace there was but one direction, and the ship could travel no other. Only in normal space could she be handled by a pilot.

"We can survive at the worst," San said, "if we keep out of hyper. There is plenty to record. And in time we might find a planet circling a warm sun."

"Yes," Dal agreed. "We could do that. But we won't."

"You may feel that way now Dal. But what about the rest of us? Look at Kee and Flemin. They're searching for an answer in the library. They're searching dutifully because each of us was trained to obey, and place our trust in the superior brains in Mother Ship."

As she hesitated, Dal studied San. "You're not like Kee, or Flemin," he said. "Let me tell you something. In a corner of my mind I resisted the hours and days and weeks of psycho-instruction. I could not help it."

"How in the world did the espers pass your thoughts up?" she asked, stark incredulity in her voice.

Dal grinned. "I learned about mental blocks early." He rose, facing her. They were of even height. "Except just now," he added. "Read me."

San gasped, and stared at him for a moment in stunned silence. Then she wheeled and left the room.

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Dal laughed. After a moment signals started flashing. It was time to eat again. Thank goodness, Dal told himself, the Pra could still function when faced with the necessity of maintaining ship routine.

Flemin couldn't eat, but Kee forced herself to nibble at the synthetic foods, with at least a pretense of relish. San ate in silence, avoiding Dal's eyes. The latter had a stout appetite, and when he finished he lit a cigarette, also synthetic. He sipped a glass of synthetic wine, and presently he was smiling.

"What's come over you?" Flemin asked sullenly. "How can you smile at a time like this?"

Dal Erik sobered. "I was just thinking," he said. "Let's explain it by saying I'm a throwback to my Viking ancestors. You should have joined San in reading about them, Flemin. Earth's ocean, in a tiny wooden shell of a boat, with sails to propel them, and no charts, or compass, was as appalling as the Galaxy. It had to be. Yet they set sail and found the American continent."

"A thousand miles or so," Flemin jeered. "And you compare them to us, navigating thousands of parsecs in space."

"The Vikings considered two thousand miles quite a distance," Dal said.

"What difference does it make?" Kee interposed. "What is going to happen to *us?* Nothing else matters. Our one immediate vital concern should be to find out how to repair the Pra's brain. In the library—"

"You wouldn't find the answer in ten thousand years, Kee. The brain units are made in hundreds of plants, manned by technicians who have worked on them for generations. But we have a chance to survive," Dal said. "A chance founded on a theory which the politicians in the Federation suppressed."

"The—Tenison theory," Flemin gasped. Kee looked scared, and San's lips grew tighter. "We are forbidden to discuss it," Flemin said sternly. "And we have to report you. You should know better."

"Report to whom?" Dal asked, grinning. "Suppose the Tenison theory is tabu? Again, suppose we *prove* it."

Flemin leaped to his feet. "That's enough, Dal. You've removed yourself from authority by disloyalty to the Federation. You're under arrest."

Dal Erik was glad the Pra carried no arms. The Pra did her own fighting. Now he leaned back in his seat, ignoring Flemin.

"We must spend a long time, in normal space," he said. "Learning, section by section, the nerve cables, the thousand and one machines—for the time we may have to take over."

"Dal, go to quarters," Flemin shouted. "I'm firing an accello beam, announcing my decision."

"Sit down," Dal said. His voice was level, and surprisingly Flemin obeyed. "Suppose I yield to disci-

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pline. You fire a beam. In due time it reaches Earth. You'd write an obituary for the Pra, and no more. In the micro files your name would be listed as a second officer who did his duty, and died. In a month you'd be forgotten. I vote to survive, if I have a chance.

"Kee," he wheeled on the smaller woman," do *you* want to die?"

"I—n-no." Kee stared at him, her lips quivering. "I w-want to live."

"San?"

San lit a cigarette, and drew a long puff. Calmly she regarded Dal, her green eyes glowing. "I'm with you Dal," she said.

"You're out-voted, three to one," Dal told Flemin. "We'll fire a beam. I'll announce that the Pra has a disabled brain, and that we're still on course and testing out the Tenison theory. Wait—" he looked around at the three startled faces. "I'll add that it's against the judgment of the second officer. I'll take the blame."

Flemin shook his head. "We'll go on," he said, with sullen anger, "a derelict ship with four corpses in her hull."

"Send the beam message," Dal told Kee.

Dal had a set of commander's keys. Jingling them in his palm he went to his quarters and opened the compartment leading to the Pra's brain. A moment later he was in the tiny, circular room where a series of crystal globes glowed, each attached by an intricate network of wires to batteries of tubes and transistors. They were tubes without heat, built to last for centuries. A half dozen banks were inert, and others flickered abnormally. Dal put a hand on the central globe.

"You poor devil," he whispered. "If you understand, I'm telling you I'm trying to get you back home."

He seemed to hear, or maybe he felt, a sigh. He still seemed to hear it when he went back to the others, and led them to the library.

"I'm going to outline the Tenison theory to you," he said. "Believe it or not, Director Mersch allowed me to study it aboard Mother Ship. It was claimed by Dr. Tenison, a hundred and sixty years before our time, that not only was light curved, but all other frequencies as well. As you were taught, the Einstein-Zagrob-Mashaka theory, developed before the year three thousand, was the basis of space travel. Then came the frightening period when we discovered beyond any possibility of doubt that a half million stars and star clusters of an expanding outer Galaxy were passing through ours."

"What has all this got to do with your precious Tenison theory?" Flemin demanded.

"This much," Dal said. "It was only after Mother Ship had been completed and her survey fleet was under construction that Lever Tenison published his report. He was then director at Vega. Using the parallax method, and cross checking from outpost ships in the Cen-

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tauri region, he found—or claimed to have found—five stars from a third outer Galaxy moving in the same direction as ours. They were the T1, TA and three red stars which were cepheid variables.

"From his observations Tenison concluded that the half million stars moving counter to our Galaxy's course, and the actual invasion of those six, were all part of the same general pattern. In other words, the Galaxy is turning in upon itself." Dal watched Flemin's face.

"One and the same stellar system! Why—why, it goes against everything they taught us," Flemin cried. "No wonder there was a penalty, and disgrace—"

Dal smiled. "Where we are at this moment, any opinion as to the merits of Dr. Tenison's theory is immaterial, and irrelevant. We're going back into hyper, after we've studied the Pra's nerve system. And we're letting the ship hold to her course."

"To infinity," Kee whispered, shuddering. "Until we die!"

"Or circle back—'curve back' might be a more accurate way of expressing it—upon our so-called line," Dal said. "In which case, if we prove Tenison was right, we'll be near our own solar system. I'd like to visit Earth before I die."

San squeezed Dal's arm. Flemin still looked sullen, incredulous, and Kee seemed stunned. Dal flashed a mental order to San, hoping that her limited ESP faculty would receive it: "Stay here."

San raised her eyes quickly and nodded.

Dal went directly to the first officer's room. Against a metal cabinet he placed a lock-combination ring of unusual design which he wore on the middle finger of his left hand. The cabinet door swung open. Again Dal applied his key and an inner compartment opened more slowly, revealing a ray gun attached to a flexible coil, part of the Pra itself.

Dal leaned forward and touched a projection within the compartment. It was an emergency act, and somewhere the Pra was recording it, for only a first officer could be armed. Under ordinary circumstances when the ship was in danger Dal delegated the defense task to the Pra, as the rules demanded.

He walked back to where the others stood waiting and with a quick, reassuring nod to San passed on down the corridor. He stopped before the men's mating room, and pressed firmly on the door. It opened, and the sensuous feel and perfume instantly set his heart to pounding.

Dal lifted the ray gun, and in seconds the interior was wrecked. Then he entered the women's room. He heard Kee and San screaming as he used the destructive weapon. There was a sharp, crackling sound as heat boiled into the corridor.

Calmly Dal faced Flemin and Kee as they ran furiously toward him.

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"You monster," Flemin shouted, leaping at him.

Although he was lighter and smaller than Dal, his fury made him a dangerous antagonist. Dal was thrust back against the wall and for an instant Flemin almost succeeded in wresting the ray gun from him. Then Dal struck out savagely and Flemin went down. He groaned, and rolled over on his side, his face convulsively twitching.

It was then that Kee took a hand. Kicking, clawing, screaming, she forced Dal to give ground, and the fierceness of her attack gave Flemin a chance to stagger to his feet.

Dal experienced fear, for he knew if either Kee or Flemin got possession of the weapon, he would be vaporized. And Kee had an arm about his waist now and was reaching nearer and nearer.

San had taken no part in the conflict, but suddenly she darted in, and grasped Kee's arm. She tugged relentlessly, forcing Kee to release her grip on Dal's waist and retreat ignominiously down the corridor.

Dal finished Flemin in short order. San locked Kee in her own room, and came back quickly, her face drained of all color. Flemin was sitting on the deck, with his legs outspread. He looked up in blind fury.

"A space officer who destroys Federation equipment without authority must face trial," he said. "The property of the Federation must be safeguarded at all costs. The penalty of failure is death." Flemin turned to San. "You too have violated your oath. I condemn both of you to death."

"He has done wrong, Flemin," San agreed softly. "Yet he has the right of all Federation officers to defend his act."

Dal handed the ray gun to San. "Return this to its compartment," he said. "The brain will accept it without my ring. And bring Kee back here. I've something to say to her."

As San obeyed, Dal faced Flemin. "I could blast you into gas," he said. "You idiot. Now you listen to me."

He was talking quietly when Kee reappeared, walking ahead of San, her head down. Dal's voice rose sharply. "You two were quick to invoke regulations concerning the death penalty. Both of you attacked the commanding officer of your ship. That makes San the only one not subject to trial. Do you question that?"

Flemin rose, his lips tightening. "Yes," he admitted. "Kee and I have broken Federation law too. I am willing to accept San as first officer."

Kee looked up. "It would be just."

"And you?" Dal turned to San. "What would *you* do if I turned over command to you?"

San didn't answer him. Instead, she addressed Flemin and Kee. "Dal has a plan. We haven't. The

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situation is so desperate that common sense alone leaves us no alternative. We ought to try out his plan, at least."

Flemin pondered for a moment, his fists clenched. "It's insane, I tell you. Look what he's done. Championing Tenison—destroying the mating rooms. And all this talk of taking over the brain functions—"

Kee turned and walked back along the corridor to her room, sobbing.

Flemin watched her in tight-lipped resignation. "I'll do what you ask," he told San. "But I refuse to execute orders from Dal."

"Fair enough," Dal said briefly.

San appeared dubious as they sat in Dal's room, and reviewed the situation. "I joined you as an act of self-preservation," she said. "It doesn't mean that I agree with you—only that I've read enough of your thoughts to know you believe in your plan. Are you honestly convinced you have one?"

"It's simple enough, San. We go back into hyper and give the Pra her head. All I ask is that each of us conscientiously learn and master one function of the operational system. That too is an act of self-preservation. If the brain gives out—and it will in time—we can work out manual controls."

"But where do we begin?"

Dal smiled. "Another illegal act of mine. I swiped a complete set of micro-films on Mother Ship. There are plans of virtually all the brains in space ships like ours."

San shook her head. "Suppose we prove this Tenison theory and find our solar system. You'd be a criminal on Earth. I'd have to testify against you along with Kee and Flemin."

"I'll either be a criminal or a hero, San. That's better than having the hull of the Pra as a tomb." Dal got up, crossed to her side and took her hand. "San, don't you see? We've got to break out. If Tenison was wrong, we'll reach some planet eventually, before we get too old. If he was right, we'll know in months."

She looked at him, clasping hands about her knees. "Dal," she asked. "What has a planet to offer? We have no fertilizing lab. The psycho-school—how could we replace it if there *were* a method of bearing children? We are completely untrained in such biogenetic procedures."

Dal laughed. "Were our ancestors untrained in reproducing? San, haven't you ever thought of the futility of men and women, under our system? When you reach thirty you are transferred to Mother Ship, and in time the lab will call you. And presently you will bear a child. And after each child reaches school age they'll take it away and you'll bear another, until the time comes to join the aged. And what will happen then?"

"You take the hypo-coma and go back to a station."

Dal shook his head. "That's what they told you, San. They'll fire you

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into space—period. I know, but don't ask how I know."

San was silent for a time. "I've heard whispers. But Dal, the problem still defeats us. I know what you mean, but Kee and I are at the mercy of mental blocks planted in us when we were children."

"Yet you accepted the mating synthetic."

She gave him a straight look. "So did you."

"Not recently. San, you've pored over ancient writings as I have. Did you ever read about the lotus eaters?"

"Yes. They ate lotus blooms to forget. They were completely, deliriously happy."

"Did this life, and the mating room make you happy?"

"I don't know," San answered soberly. "For years I was trained for this, the greatest of undertakings. Just as you were. I regarded everything else as normal."

Dal nodded. "We were eased into complete regimentation, generation by generation."

Suddenly he bent, and swept San into his arms. He found her moist lips, crushing them against his own. And San yielded, her body thrust against his, returning his embrace.

Only for an instant did that moment of rapture endure. With a sudden cry she broke from his grasp, breathing hard, and there was a wild look in her eyes, almost of hatred.

"You beast," she gasped. "You primitive, unreasoning beast." She ran out of the room.

Dal spoke his thoughts aloud. "What a task I've set myself." Then, almost reverently: "But what an objective."

Oddly enough, during the first weeks, Kee lost her sulkiness, save for occasional periods of hysteria. She joined San in studying the films. Her assignment was to check the brain-section which transformed the stock of concentrates and made them into synthetic products for the meals.

San put her attention upon the air and water reclaiming plants. Flemin, at San's suggestion, turned to the reflex area which was the most complicated of all. He ignored Dal, but carried out his task with characteristic energy.

Dal checked all findings. Some phases of the brain he passed up. The power system was self-contained. The gravity field was inbuilt. But it was the hyper drive robots that worried Dal. And, he had to admit, there was no clue in the plans.

San avoided Dal, save for the times they gathered in the mess hall. Flemin had adopted a polite code, but there were times when his face gave his inner thoughts away. And occasionally, when Dal concentrated in his room, he became aware of the other's scheming in a more unnerving way, the hostile thoughts impinging directly on his mind.

And so they entered hyper drive.

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Dal knew that Flemin had sent out an accello beam message, but the knowledge did not disturb him. The Milo had turned back too far to receive or reply to messages. In fact, he reflected, the Milo would waste no beams, for the Pra had almost certainly been written off after receipt of Dal's earlier report.

Kee was the first to break, after five days in hyper. She was tracing circuits leading into the food converter when her screams brought the others running. Kee struggled furiously, clawing and kicking and shaking off detaining hands. She reached the mating room door which Dal had welded, and sank to her knees, pounding upon the twisted, blackened metal and continuing to scream until she was exhausted.

Flemin and San put her to bed. Shaken, Flemin faced the first officer. "You're accountable for her sanity," he said, accusingly.

Dal shrugged and walked away. He was unprepared for San's hostility, however, when she told him, that she had given Kee a hypo. "She'll recover this time, but she'll be bitter and resentful. Do you have another of your heroic remedies?" she asked.

Dal returned San's stare calmly, his eyes passing from her face down over the tight portion of plastic fabric which covered her shapely form.

"Yes," he said with a smile, "I have other remedies—to be used in good time."

This time San colored. Her lips were compressed, but she seemed unsure of herself, and Dal felt an urge to follow her and gather her into his arms. He restrained the impulse. "Not yet," he whispered. "Not yet. She must do a lot of thinking first."

Flemin didn't break like Kee. He kept to himself, his face no longer betraying his inner restlessness and the hostile trend of his thoughts. But Dal misjudged the man. The first officer was sleeping off watch when San's voice seemed to whisper deep in his mind, "Watch out, Dal. Watch out."

Dal stirred, and in the dim light of the instrument room caught the outlines of a man. He leaped from the bunk just as Flemin sprang.

Dal moved quickly away, but not toward the intruder who carried a blunt metal instrument. The emergency panel was within reach. He smashed the plastic cover, and yanked a pull switch. Instantly the room was degravitized. Holding firmly to the lever, Dal watched as Flemin floated toward him, kicking and squirming. Drawing back his arms, Dal lashed out with all his strength. Flemin crashed into the wall, cursing wildly and then going limp. Dal closed the switch, restoring gravity.

San was outside when Dal bore Flemin's body toward the latter's room. She grasped his shoulder, her voice tremulous with relief. "Dal! I caught his thoughts!"

"Thanks," Dal said briefly. "I'm

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locking him in for the present. Was Kee in on this?"

"I'm sure she wasn't. I think she's busy." San tiptoed from the room and was gone a few moments. When she returned, Dal was locking Flemin's cabin door. "Kee's tracing circuits," San said.

"Good." Dal took San by the shoulder, and guided her into his room.

She made no protest, even when he crushed her to him in an eager, unrestrained embrace. This time her arms closed behind his neck and her lips brushed his cheek. "Dal, Dal, we're doing wrong—"

"By the rules, yes. But you're a woman." He kissed her, hard. "I love you," he whispered.

"Dal, it's forbidden, but—I love you too, with all my heart."

Her eyes were shining now.

Instinct urged Dal to press his advantage.

In hyperspace time is artificial. San stirred in Dal's arms. How long she had lapsed into a delicious kind of sleep, she neither knew, nor cared.

"Dal," she exclaimed, "I've got to have a talk with Kee." She reached over and kissed him and made ready to go outside.

In ten minutes she was back. "Dal, Kee and Flemin are whispering together in Kee's room. And when I knocked she told me to go away. I wonder—"

Dal reached for her, but San was already sliding into the bunk beside him. She sighed as the strength of his arms enfolded her. "Dal—"

He laughed softly. "Relax, darling. They've found the answer too. Nature was stronger than the psycho-blocks."

And so peace came to the four. The Pra continued on, holding steadily to her course, and one day a set of banks blew out. But the four were ready, even eager to take over manual controls. Now they rigged thermostats, monitors, signals with such quick, coordinated efficiency that the power was maintained.

A new Pra came into being.

Dal took to standing watch alone. He was beginning to wonder about the Tenison theory, for it had been six weeks now since they had re-entered hyperspace. Suddenly he chose to cut into normal space. The Pra drifted on course, and Dal presently switched on all screens. He was gratifyingly aware of San's entry. She kissed his cheek, then watched the screens as Dal swept the black skyrama.

"Dal," she exclaimed, pointing. "Do you see that tiny cluster? No, it's more to your right on the second screen!"

He stiffened, spun the enlarger dial. "By all that's good and true—it's the Pleiades!" he exclaimed.

"And Ursa Minor! And Altair—Vega—" In her excitement San pressed the alarm signal, and a moment later Kee and Flemin came stumbling in. "Look," San said, dancing up and down in her excite-

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ment, "Look carefully at that star —and its *nine* planets."

Flemin stared. "It's Earth's solar system! I'd recognize it anywhere, from the charts, and the planetarium on Mother Ship! Dal—" He grew pale. "Dal, you were right. The Tenison theory was sound!"

Kee squeezed Dal's arm. "Suppose—just suppose they don't want the Tenison theory proven. And what about the laws we broke? Maybe we'd better keep on going. We've found happiness, and the Pra will last our lifetime."

"Don't be silly," Flemin said. "Dal, you shook me loose from a lot of crippling ideas. And you gave me Kee. What I'm trying to say is that I'm with you, whatever you may decide to do."

Dal looked at San. He read the verdict in her eyes even before she spoke. "They conditioned us for a specific task on Mother Ship. To succeed we had to conform. And in time we *would* have succeeded, and confirmed the Tenison theory. But we would never have found each other, as humans."

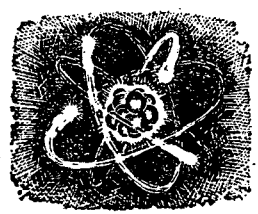
"I have a strange kind of faith," Dal said. "I believe that the men and women who administer Earth Federation cherish a freedom which they deny to others for reasons we may soon discover. They must have it. We're going home—to the home of our ancestors—with a revelation as important as anything man had learned in centuries. We've solved a problem—a Galactic problem. So, I'm not worrying."

He stood there, ready to throw the Pra into hyper and finish the voyage. Kee lifted her face, shoulder to shoulder with Flemin. They both nodded.

Dal smiled and drew San close to him—so close that he could feel the tumultuous beating of her heart. He cut the Pra out of normal space.

They may take our lives, he thought. But we're going to find out. As free men and women.

As Vikings should.



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proof

by . . . Eric Frank Russell

The aliens were not quite sure of their greatness. In fact, they had a dreadful inferiority complex until they met—B. D. Ize!

THE VAST bulk of the *Viking* ceased to vibrate, and went completely silent. It hung in deep space, a black monster with golden brilliance pouring from its ports. A hundred men lined its starboard catwalk and gazed curiously into the starfield. Four uniformed groups waited expectantly by the four airlocks on the same side.

Dwarfed by the immensity of their rescuer the pair of lifeboats swung nearer. They came in with propulsors dead, drawn only by mutual attraction. They touched the armorplate skin, rubbed along with harsh grating sounds. Magnets halted them at the locks as slowly they slid toward centerpoint. Lock-links connected and heavy doors opened.

Civilians who came through the locks wore the strained gladness of those who had abandoned all hope only to have it incredibly revived. Four men, four women, ten children. The *Viking's* complement welcomed them aboard with the horny-handed sympathy that long had been the tradition of great oceans and now was equally that of mightier deeps.

The lifeboats' crews were of

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different fiber, big, barrel-chested men typical of those who crawl precariously from world to world in ramshackle metal bottles. Flyers of worn-out hulks discarded by the space-navies of a dozen planets. Finanglers with bits of tin and pieces of string who always got there so long as nothing blew up. These stepped aboard grinning, and swapped good-humored banter with the onlookers.

"Lucky again, sailor?"

"I was born that way. And I'll still be squirting along when you fancy fliers will be earthbound with age."

Last through the lock was the captain bearing a book under his arm. A tall, bearded man with the distantly focussed eyes of a professional space-rover. He stopped on the gangway, watching the locks close while he chatted with an officer.

"Thanks, Mister. Someday we may do as much for you."

"What happened, Captain?"

"Linings blew out and the metal casings promptly joined the reaction. She started going hell for leather with no way to stop her before she burned her tail off. We sent out a Mayday call and took to the boats." He stroked his beard, and added, "The *Betty Lee* was old and worn. I guess her number came up."

"That's bad. Is she running in the lanes?"

"No. I jerked her Siriusward and left her to boost out of harm's way. Nothing is roaming around that sector yet." He tightened his arm-grip on the book. "Bang goes a load of seeds for Castro. But I managed to save the log. Everything else was abandoned. We have nothing but our clothes."

A red-haired and lavishly freckled boy standing nearby heard his words and began to snivel. He was about nine years old. He looked at the captain through tear-spattered lashes as if holding him personally responsible, rubbed his eyes with dirty knuckles, and wept louder.

"Now, now, Georgie," soothed his mother, throwing the captain an apologetic glance. "Everything is all right. There's no need to cry. Don't make a baby of yourself."

"I want B. D. Ize," sobbed the boy.

"We didn't have time," said the mother. "Anyway, he's all right. A ship all to himself. Lots of adventures. What more could he wish?"

"They left B. D. Ize," howled the boy, giving way to himself completely. "I want him. They shouldn't have left him. I want B. D. Ize."

"Hush now!" She led him along the catwalk. "Let's have a look over this lovely big cruiser. They have all sorts of wonderful things—"

They disappeared around the far corner but the sobs still came back together with strident demands for Mr. B. D. Ize. The officer and the

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captain gazed meditatively along the passage. Then the captain shrugged.

"If wishes were fishes we'd bring 'em in easier."

"And not want them half as much," capped the officer who was somewhat of a philosopher.

TROD OG the Trapster lounged on bright red sand and dozily watched the heave of an oily green sea on which rolled the wooden signal-pins of his water-serpent snares. An orange sun blazed down, the sand was soft and warm, and the pins swayed with hypnotic rhythm. He reposed flat on his belly with eight legs sprawled out four to a side and enjoyed the life of an unknown other-worlder named Reilly.

The sea went *slop-glug* on the sand and the pins teetered to and fro and Trod Og's eyes kept receding into their bone tunnels before being reluctantly forced out again. Thus he revelled in the period of waiting for his magic to work.

Before long a few tasty serpents would detect the *solum* fruits in the sunken baskets, enter and eat thereof and be smitten stiff by the potent juices. It was good to have been born a high form of life, the highest in the universe. As such, one had command of magic denied to all the rest.

His eyes started sinking again and he forced them out with an effort, idly noting a flicker of brilliance above the horizon. The low humming of nearby trumpet blossoms did nothing to cure his somnolence. He gave an extended yawn that ended in a loud, "Unk!" twitched his belly in the sand and viewed the pins again.

The brilliance became a dot, a disc, a shiny thing moving faster than a thunderstone. Trod Og shoved out his eyes, drew in his legs and stood up, his head-crest quivering with alarm.

It was large and fearsome by the time it struck the water, meeting the surface at a shallow angle and bounding along it between twin fans of spray that soared far higher than a bowshot. The whole bay shook as it charged for the beach with a tremendous hissing sound that silenced the trumpet blossoms, the sea itself, the whole world.

Trod Og turned and trod ogs a good deal more swiftly than he'd done in the Sacrificial Sprint where the last runner is roasted in honor of the Lord of Lords. He made a gallant attempt to exceed the velocity of the arrival, thus demonstrating that there is nothing a superior lifeform won't try once. Nonetheless he failed. The oncomer hit the beach, shot up it twenty yards to his left, and plunged through large trees that snapped like twigs. There amid a litter of broken growths it came to a stop.

A load of hurled sand knocked the galloping Trod Og's stern off true course. But his piloting was superb, he regained direction in an

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instant and without loss of pace, kept going good and fast. He made no attempt to examine the arrival or even to bear with him a superficial description derived from a hasty glance. His full attention remained concentrated on the path ahead and his long, flabby ears streamed backward in the wind as he strove with all his might to justify the adage that action and reaction invariably are equal and opposite.

He entered the village at such velocity that he went through Wern Eff's woven wicker door without the formality of opening it. This was no time for the careful observance of tribal customs. Inside, he pulled up with all eight feet skidding on the grass carpet while a heavy table slid endwise under his impact.

"Glittering nightlights!" ejaculated Wern Eff, scowling at the silhouette of Trod Og now gaping in his door. "What ails thee, fool?"

"An artifice of the air-fiends," gasped Trod Og. "It fell from the sky. It moved faster than the Streaker."

"Impossible!" declared Wern Eff who was a chief and well-educated to boot. He knew that this tiny satellite was the all-seeing eye of the Lord of Lords and had a fair idea of its rate of motion. "*Im*-possible!"

"I saw it, of the Emperor's truth," insisted Trod Og. "It came upon me in an ear-flick."

"What was it like unto?"

"I do not know," Og said.

"Yet thine eyes set upon it?" scoffed Wern Eff. "A likely tale!" He studied Trod Og with sinister speculation. "It would seem that we have not yet finished with our systematic elimination of the daft."

"No, no!" protested Trod Og, going hot and cold by turns. "I tell thee, Chief, of the Emperor's truth, the artifice is there. It knocked down half the *morstor* grove, big as they may be. Go and see for thyself."

"That I will," said Wern Eff, and added with greater menace, "but if this proves to be an imbecile's dream the Lord of Lords shall have first pick at thy crisps."

He moved to the door, paused to have another ireful look at its gap. Going outside, he took the warn-horn from its hook and blew a wailing note. His chieftain's guard promptly appeared complete with spring-bows and broadswords. Escorted by these he paraded toward the bay with Trod Og following where he would gain fifty yards start in a sudden retreat.

From a vantage point behind a distant *morstor* tree Wern Eff studied the *Betty Lee*. The ship revealed no visible threat so he stepped boldly into the open with his guard arrayed on either side. Nothing happened. He took ten steps nearer with the guard doing likewise. Still nothing happened, nothing at all.

In this manner he got right up to the vessel's side and no magic

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was worked against him. He struck the metal shell with a stick and nobody answered. Boldly now he walked around the alien vessel and found a circular gap in the other side.

"This be the way in," he declared. "And it ill becomes such as us to hesitate." He pointed at the brawniest member of his guard. "Therefore it is thy part to enter and report what lurks within, hiding from our gaze."

The guard, who enjoyed the doubtful cognomen of Wun Suk, was not enthused by this order but had the free choice of obeying or parting from his bowels. Accordingly he loosed his broadsword and clambered through the hole.

After a bit he stuck his head out and informed, "There are many strange clock-faces upon the walls, arrayed like protective totems. There are also little wheels and metal handles."

"Turn the wheels and pull the handles," ordered Wern Eff. "Then we shall see whether this magic has been nullified by our presence."

Wun Suk swallowed hard, went away, and protruded the head again. "I have done so, Chief. There is no magic. Neither is any form of sky-fiend in evidence."

"Thou hast not searched the half of it," snapped Wern Eff, werning a couple of effs. "Seek farther."

Vanishing again, Wun Suk stole cautiously along a metal passage, and entered a room full of crates and sacks. Lifting the lid of the nearest crate he found it full of fibrous nodules. The sacks contained strange seeds of several kinds. A couple of them had ragged holes in a bottom corner and were leaking seeds upon the floor.

Grunting disdainfully he shoved a crate aside and came face to face with B. D. Ize.

His Scintillating Supremacy Ya Hu, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Emperor of the Universe, straddled his throne which resembled a lavishly upholstered trestle. Four legs dangled either side of it as if he were four men astride a vaulting-horse. He held his belly in his hands, twitched his head-crest irritatedly.

"Well?"

'Supremacy," said the eminent expert Pas Alt, crawling forward with a paper in his grasp, "I have here the official report on the artifice which was thrown upon the shore of the Eastern Ocean."

"Recite it," commanded Ya Hu, vaguely interested.

"It is little more than a very large version of the steam-cans such as children cause to leap from celebratory fires on the auspicious occasion of thy Supremacy's birthday."

"Humph!" said Ya Hu, adding a contemptuous sniff.

"Except," Pas Alt went on with the air of mentioning a matter of little moment, "that it did not employ steam."

"Then what did it use—*solum* juice?"

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"That thine experts have been unable to decide," informed Pas Alt apologetically. "The can is devoid of liquid other than the natural moisture in its cargo. Furthermore, the magic proved faulty because the entire end of the can is destroyed."

"Which was to be expected," declared Ya Hu. "Inferior life-forms cannot help but produce the most rudimentary devices—if they are capable of producing any at all."

"Oh, true, how true, Supremacy," agreed Pas Alt, planting the full weight of his learning behind the imperial thesis. He consulted the paper again. "The can bore a quantity of unknown seeds which will be sown and grown under careful watch and heavy guard. Frequent reports concerning these will be submitted for thy gracious consideration."

"It is well," conceded Ya Hu. "Is that all?"

"No, Supremacy." Pas Alt became slightly smug. "As thou knowest, thine experts excel at the intelligent translation of visible phenomena. And on the basis of data derived from this can they conclude that its construction required the united efforts of seventy thousand to one hundred thousand air-fiends."

"Ah!" Ya Hu leaned forward, inquired with a touch of sarcasm, "How do they arrive at that, never having seen an air-fiend?"

"Because," explained Pas Alt, unable to suppress a note of triumph, "an air-fiend rode within the can and we captured him alive."

"Indeed? He steered the device I presume?"

"Yes, Supremacy. A low form of life but intelligent."

Ya Hu glowered and said in harsh reproof, "That cannot be. Amid all the sky-lights from the sunup line to the sundown line only we have true intelligence."

He drew himself up.

"Thy pardon, Supremacy, but he proved it beyond dispute, in manner that would satisfy even thyself."

"You dare to—"

"He demonstrated it," interjected Pas Alt hurriedly, "by immediately recognizing our superiority, by fawning upon us humbly and ingratiatingly like a worshipper in the presence of his gods."

"That is different," admitted Ya Hu, completely mollified. "I would see him for myself."

"He is here." Pas Alt clapped hands. His assistant ran in bearing a small barred box. Opening it, he took out Mr. B. D. Ize. "Here, Supremacy, is the pilot."

Ya Hu stared at the brown-furred thing which was not as big as one of his feet. It had shiny button eyes, shell-shaped ears and a long, naked tail. "Give him to me."

Pas Alt obediently passed him over. The pet rat sat up on Ya Hu's hand, used tiny forepaws to comb its whiskers. Ya Hu tickled it under

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the chin and it responded by playing with his fingertip.

"Verily," said Ya Hu in manifest delight, "even a fiend from above knows his master on mere sight. What better proof could one have of our celestial greatness?"

At that point Mr. B. D. Ize saw fit to venture an opinion.

Frowning, Ya Hu said to Pas Alt, "Give me thy headcloth—my hand has become moist."

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rebirth

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

She was sure that her cleverness had not deserted her. But a woman may find the way to a man's heart difficult—if he has been to Mars.

CORA THORNTON gave her ash-blonde hair a pat, and walked slowly around the big, comfortable room, straightening ash trays, making sure for the hundredth time that the man she was expecting would find no flaw in the room—or in herself.

She realized with pleasure that her cleverness had not deserted her. A man like Tom could never be satisfied with the less-than-perfect. It was important that the beauty and serenity of the room should remind him that his happiness concerned her vitally.

She was sure that if she met him at the door, poised and cool, with the light glowing gold on her hair, the old flame would need no rekindling. He would come at once under the spell of her beauty again.

Coolness he liked, but only as a brief pretense before they abandoned all pretense. She'd sit on the arm of his chair, laughing and pretending to be busy with his pipe and slippers. She'd tempt him with her beauty, letting her hair brush his cheek, whispering in gay mockery.

Frank Belknap Long has a remarkable talent for imprisoning startling events in quite miraculous bubbles which seem to weave in and out of several dimensions at once as they float toward the reader. And then, unexpectedly, he'll come up with a simple little tale such as this, told with exactly the kind of high-fidelity suspense and excitement that makes unusual characters seem unforgettable on a completely human plane.

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She'd know when she could safely exult. At the exact moment when her power over him could not be broken by anything she might say or do he'd draw her hungrily into his arms and kiss her, and she would never have to share him again.

Never again with anyone.

She'd turned off the video screen because sharing him had become intolerable to her. The room was no longer filled with a continuous shouting. The cars behind and ahead had stopped and for a moment Tom's image had filled the screen and she had been alone with him. Then the slow-moving procession had started up again, and she had lost him to two million other women.

They had shouted and waved and paid homage to him with their eyes, and blown kisses at him from their red idiot lips until she had seemed to be watching some grotesque scene of high comedy which had revolted her to the core of her being.

With the screen turned on he was lost to her. But when the screen went dark his great achievement ceased to stand between them like a resounding board echoing his praises until she stood trembling and betrayed by her own bitter frustration.

There was no need for her to remind herself that it was an achievement unique in human history. He had left Earth and returned. He had crossed forty million miles of space to another planet, but in the silence of the waiting room he belonged to her alone.

She closed her eyes, her mind going back to the last time she had refused to share him. She remembered how carefully she had chosen her words, how softly she had spoken them.

"Margaret will get over you, darling. I never could."

Her kisses had pleaded with him too, with their own secret whisperings. "If you want me badly enough you'll tell her tonight. It's been torture for me to know you didn't love me enough to tell her."

What a superb actress she was!

A miscalculation? She refused to believe it. How could she have known that Tom's wife would strike back with the only weapon left to a woman who just wasn't strong-willed enough to go out, and find herself another man?

The sweet-faced, simpering little fool! Deliberately letting the car get out of control, driving it over a cliff into the sea.

Fortunately Tom had blamed only himself. "I never really stopped loving her, Cora. I can't even use that as an excuse."

For a moment she surrendered to bitterness, remembering how Tom had used his grief and remorse as an excuse to confront her with another rival.

"They're sending a liquid-fuel rocket to Mars, Cora. It will carry a human passenger, and I have a very good chance of being the man selected. I've done enough work on

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rockets to give my application a high priority rating."

A very good chance to atone, to erase his sense of guilt. She had watched his face to see if he had any inkling of the cruel blow he was inflicting on her. Apparently he hadn't. If only—

She straightened in sudden, startled disbelief, listening to the steps coming down the hall. *His steps!* There could be no mistaking them. She knew his swift, assured pace as she knew the rhythms of her own breathing.

She went quickly to the door and threw it wide.

"Tom! Oh, darling, just stand there for a minute. I want to look at you."

He hadn't changed at all. He stood in the doorway quietly regarding her, a darkly handsome man of thirty-seven with speculative brown eyes that could light up and change his entire expression. She waited for his eyes to change, to glow with a prideful, tender possessiveness. Instead his brows drew together, and he brushed quickly past her into the room.

She followed him. He stood very still in the middle of the room, staring about him at the familiar furniture. She expected him to say: "It's good to be back, Cora!" But when his eyes met hers they were cold, distant.

"I'll get you a drink, darling," she said.

She went hastily to the liquor cabinet. Her hands trembled as she poured out two jiggers of Scotch, and filled the glass almost to the brim with soda.

When she brought him the drink he was no longer standing. He had seated himself in a chair by the fireplace, and she saw that he was looking at her in a disturbingly intense way. He took the glass and drained it in a single gulp.

He spoke then for the first time. "You'll never know what it was like," he said. "The desert, the burning sands. A man's thoughts become abnormal."

"You are home now," she said. "I will find a way to make you forget. Nothing has changed, darling."

Cora felt the chill of his eyes go through her. "A man's personality splits up," he said. "It's incredible. Here on Earth we hide from ourselves the fact that we are not one, but many—a multitude of contradictory mental selves. But on Mars there is no need for pretense."

She stared at him, her throat strangely dry. "What are you talking about, Tom?"

"There are miles on miles of ruins," he said, ignoring the question. "Machines in the scorched waste, a city of the dead."

"Tom—"

"Listen to me. Listen carefully. There are matter-duplicating machines on Mars. Unbelievable shapes of metal that still function in the stony desolation."

He was still holding the glass, but she took it from him. She touched his arm. "Tom, you can

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tell me all this later. When you are rested it will do you good to talk. You will talk and I will listen."

Tom did an incredible thing then. He threw back his head and laughed. His laughter boomed out in the big room while his eyes mocked the woman who stood trembling before him.

"If you are wise you will listen now," he said. "I will tell you first what a machine can do to matter. Did you know that a machine can scan matter, and use energies drawn from the sun to transform a featureless block of nuclear particles into an exact duplicate of the object scanned—a tree, a rock, an animal?"

Tom straightened in his chair and his face grew haggard with a weariness that seemed to mask something shadowy and sinister that crouched in shadows like a beast of prey on iron-harsh sands.

"There were no trees on Mars, no animal life. Only—a multitude of men in a single human body."

Tom took out a handkerchief and wiped sweat from his brow. "Thomas Giles—a strange and motley multitude. Think, Cora. When we hate and when we love, when we are self-seeking and when we sacrifice ourselves for some noble ideal—are we really one and indivisible? The same person?"

She said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"We are never really and completely one person, Cora. When you drove Margaret to suicide you were a murderess, but when I held you tight in my arms you were a quite different woman. You are another woman now, a badly frightened woman."

He smiled. "But perhaps I am crediting you with more discernment than you actually possess. You may be simply puzzled and bewildered and not at all frightened."

His smile vanished. "You tempt me with your beauty, but I cannot forget the murderess."

He looked at her intently for a long moment before continuing. "On Mars there was the terrible, mind-numbing loneliness. I walked amidst the ruins, and I was Thomas Giles the generous and kind, and I was Thomas the envious, and I was Thomas the revengeful. One moment I threw myself down on the parched sands and looked up at the stars and thought of man's great destiny under the stars.

"I would have forgiven you anything then, as Margaret herself would have forgiven you. I would have refused to pass a moral judgment on a fellow human being, for what man can say with honesty that he was never once separated by a hair's breadth from the blackest of crimes—if his entire life could be traced minute by minute through every shift of impulse and frustration from the cradle to the grave?

"I would have forgiven you then, but what man can live for long on the heights? The sun was a burning glass, the desert a smouldering lake of fire. My mouth became

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parched, and my temples throbbed, and I went stumbling into a city of the dead, seeking a refuge from the intolerable heat.

"I lay gasping and sick at heart, remembering my life with Margaret, remembering the sweet and generous woman who might have been the mother of my children—"

"You fool!"

"I was not a fool then. I was another Thomas Giles. One impulse dominated me, a blind, relentless hatred of you, Cora. Before me towered the machine. I may have stumbled against it before throwing myself down. Or perhaps it did not even need to be jarred, perhaps my nearness activated the scanning mechanism as a photo-electric cell is activated by the action of light.

"There was a faint glow, a dull and continuous droning sound. As I tossed to and fro at full length with a crumbling block of stone for a pillow eighty feet of gleaming metal pulsed with light and sound. The machine came to life before my eyes, and the machine gave birth to human life.

"When I looked up I was no longer alone in the city."

Tom's face darkened and he sat for a moment in silence. Then he moved a bit in his chair and regarded her steadily.

"I should not have said that, for the instant I emerged from the machine with the blood warm in my veins I ceased to be the restless, tortured man on the sand. The Thomas Giles who emerged looked down at a Thomas tossing in distress, and knew himself to be a new creation wholly dedicated to vengeance."

Tom moistened his dry lips. "Cora, do you know what happens when a single powerful emotion dominates the mind? The thought patterns change, and the mind becomes a specialized instrument of hate or love, rage or compassion.

"The mind of a Thomas Giles knowing only hate is scanned by a matter-duplicating machine, and the stimulus-response circuits which make up the hate pattern are reproduced, and a new Thomas steps forth with a hate-filled mind. A new Thomas, a duplicate Thomas in both body and mind.

"The tortured man on the sand will quickly cease to hate. Other emotions will take complete possession of him, and he will become a multitude of selves in a single body again. But the new Thomas, the machine-made Thomas, will not be a multitude.

"He will be one Thomas only, one Thomas returning to you alone."

The man in the chair stood up.

"One Thomas hiding himself in a rocket large enough for concealment, his face pale and rather ghastly, never showing himself to the Thomas sitting on the high pilot's seat—the Thomas whose memories he will always share.

"One Thomas coming straight to you, caring nothing for the millions of other women, one Thomas con-

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tent to be alone with you with all the world shut out."

He must have read the disbelief in her eyes, for he said quickly, "If you doubt my word turn on the video."

"The video—"

"The celebration is at its height now. Turn it on. You will see that I am *not* the Tom you thought me. *He* is still enjoying his triumph."

Automatically she obeyed.

The screen flamed with light and color. The cars behind and ahead had stopped, and for a moment Tom's image filled the screen. But this time she did not claim him for herself alone. She was too horrified and frantic to do anything but stare at the Tom who had returned to her.

"What are you going to do?" she asked hoarsely.

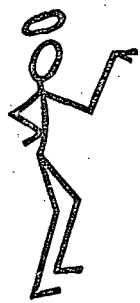
"Kill you, my dear," he said.

Straightway he advanced, but with such calm assurance that the enormity of the statement did not really dawn on her until his hands were about her throat, and had begun their slow, relentless pressure.

She cried out then, and struggled furiously, but his strength was great.

"Goodbye, Cora," he whispered softly. "Goodbye forever, my dear."

The last thing she remembered was the look of smiling satisfaction on his face as his lips receded, and his cold eyes dissolved into mist.



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the man who could go away

by . . . Ray Cummings

There was quite a commotion in Mrs. Grogan's boarding house. But no one suspected that gentle Mr. Rance had found his heart's desire.

HE KNEW that he was hovering with her in an immensity of unfathomable distances. In tier upon tier, vast grey galleries receded in every direction—galleries each with its myriad corridors, recesses, niches where the blurred shapes of unknown objects were lying. An infinitude of mysterious things, piled one upon the other, and waiting.

She said, "I wanted you to see it this time, with your own eyes."

"We were surely never here before?"

She shook her head. "No. This is the world of Unthought Things."

Everything that the dreams and desires of man would ever create was waiting here to be called into existence. The wonder of it surged within him as he hovered, peering into the mysterious reaches of the Eternal Mind, an unfathomable storehouse of human endeavor—of all that had been, and was to be.

Her voice was eager. "Your great discovery is here, of course, waiting for you to bring it into being. Awaiting only the creative spark. Your own Unthought Thing."

He remembered the clay shell of him that they called George Rance.

Early recognition and acclaim for a splendid ingenuity in one particular department of science fantasy—for an excellence, indeed, which has never been surpassed—may do a writer an injustice by labeling him a "one-idea man." The famed author of THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM *is actually just the reverse of that, as this warmly appealing little story incontestably proves.*

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It was lying in the armchair, back in his room at Mrs. Grogan's boarding house. Tattered by the years, the shell of George Rance was almost worn out now, decrepit, broken.

But still it had work to do, his life's work which was not finished yet, so that this light and leaping thing which was really he must remain Earthbound a little longer. Tonight, just for this brief time, the torn abode of clay back there was tenantless, because she had called him away. She had come and taken him, as she had done so often before down through the years.

How strange it seemed!

They had always been able to go away together. It had been easier since she died. He was thankful for that.

He could remember when it started—this strange going away. There had been a time, far back in their childhood, when she had been just the little girl next door.

"There are fairies in the garden," she had said. "I saw them."

"Let's go see."

"Let's. You can see them better when it's dark."

He could remember the tingling excitement of it as hand in hand they crept down to where the singing brook came past under the trees, and the shadows were black among the big ferns. The fairies were there, and soon they were all winging away together, leaping and light-footed, with the trees and the brook gone as they sped off into the shining realms that only childhood can know.

Now there was the same tingling excitement in him as they soared together up into the huge galleries. She murmured, "When we find it, your Unthought Thing, maybe you'll be able to remember what it's like, to help you create it when you go back."

He hoped that he could. He was so old and tired back there, it would be glorious to be finished with his work.

"And when it is done," she promised, "I will have you, forever."

"I will come," he said.

Now they were close among the niches where the blurred and almost formless things lay quiescently sleeping, mysteries as unfathomable as life itself. Many of the niches were empty, and suddenly he was asking her about them.

"Over there," she said, "Caxton's printing press waited all those eons for him to bring it out. And see that little space behind it? McCormick's reaper stood there."

They moved further along, their cheeks almost touching. He saw where the first sewing machine had been—and Edison's first crude incandescent bulb. He saw the Wright Brothers' flimsy little aeroplane which had brought them eternal glory at Kitty Hawk. Each object was a resplendent milestone on the road of human progress.

He noticed now that some of the shapes were eroded and that

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parts of them were missing—the failures, perhaps to lie here forever baffling the mind of man. And presently she led him from the past into the present, and he became aware that some of the shapes were stirring and with the great labor of their birth, struggling upward and away.

"And this is the future," she said. She stooped and picked up a tiny phial. "With this, some day all human disease will be completely conquered." She replaced the fragile vessel. "Not very big, is it, to be so important a thing?"

"Mine," he said earnestly, "will be even more important than that. It will be the greatest blessing mankind could have."

"I believe you," she replied.

But now a chill foreboding was creeping upon him. The shapes of the future seemed to melt into formless blurs as he tried to examine them more closely.

"I won't be allowed to see the thing which is waiting here for me," he said. "I'll have to go back and think it out for myself. I know that I can do it. I won't fail."

She hardly seemed to hear him, and suddenly her lips whitened and she cried out in alarm. "George, it isn't here." A poignant fear was in her voice. "It isn't here! It never has been here!"

"Not here? My great discovery, not here?"

"There is no place for it, here where it should be."

He was shocked, stunned. It was as though a lifetime of habit were taking him from her again. He said, "But why? I can do nothing back there without it. There is no need for me to return."

As he said it, he was aware that this was what they both had wanted from the first.

"Oh, I've waited so long."

"So have I."

And then the radiance was upon them—a mingling radiance, leaping and light as they sprang joyously away together . . .

THERE WAS quite a commotion in Mrs. Grogan's boarding house, that morning when old George Rance was found dead in his armchair. Mrs. Grogan was considerably upset by the incident, not only because she felt a natural measure of affection for the old man who had been with her so many years, but because it seemed to her there must be a certain opprobrium attached to having one of her boarders die thus unattended. When he hadn't appeared for breakfast that morning she had promptly investigated and found him lying peacefully dead in his chair.

George Rance was a kindly old gentleman, a little cracked maybe but certainly no trouble to anybody, as Mrs. Grogan explained to the doctor and to a neighbor woman who had excitedly come in from next door.

"A little off," Mrs. Grogan said apologetically as she made a circular motion with her finger close

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to her forehead. "You know how it often is—when a man is in his eighties."

"He seemed such a nice old man," the neighbor woman said. "Who is that?"

There was a single picture on the bureau, an old-fashioned, fading picture of a young girl of perhaps sixteen, her thin and wistful face framed by a blowing mass of hair.

"His sweetheart," Mrs. Grogan said. "She died soon after that photograph was taken. Sixty, maybe seventy years ago it was. I guess she was the only girl he ever had." And because Mrs. Grogan herself was not so very old, the natural stridence of her voice softened a little. "He called her Margaret. You could hear him talking to her, sometimes, at night. Oh, he was a queer one, all right."

"He died of old age," the physician said. "It's a good way, the proper way, to die." Dr. Simms had attended old George Rance several times in the past year. "His body just wore out. Only his will to live was keeping him alive."

The neighbor woman was gazing around the room curiously. It was a singularly cluttered room, littered with odd-looking paraphernalia—bottles and tubes, wires and grids and eroded little monstrosities of gadgets. To the women it symbolized the mystery of the unknown. To Dr. Simms it seemed perhaps the strange mismating of science with futile senility.

"Good heavens, what was he experimenting with here?" the neighbor woman said.

"His life's work," Mrs. Grogan said. "The greatest of all blessings for humanity, he called it. But he never said what it was."

The doctor's face and his voice were solemn. "He told me about it once," he said. "All he wanted to do was complete it before he died."

"But what was it?" the neighbor woman asked, wonderingly.

"He was searching for something which would change the nature of man, something one might liken to the milk of human kindness, which certainly is sadly lacking in most of us."

The doctor was smiling faintly. "Just a dream, of course. But it would have helped a lot, wouldn't it?"

Now the three of them were gazing at the dead man's cluttered room with a new curiosity, hardly knowing whether they should be amused or awed. Mrs. Grogan sighed. Perhaps she was thinking of some of the things she had said and done to her gentle old lodger, things of which perhaps she was now ashamed.

"Well, I certainly wish he'd found it. He could have started giving me some of it," Mrs. Grogan said.

Dr. Simms inclined his head.

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moving with the times

by . . . Dal Stivens

A cocky young frog learns the butterfly stroke—by a nose.

A SOMEWHAT COCKY young frog was swimming round the shores of the pool and kicking slime in his elders' eyes when his attention was caught by a piece of newspaper resting on the sand. He swaggered over to it, poked his legs into the air, and read:

"Using the butterfly stroke, Tano Froggishimo, today set new world figures for the hundred yards breast-stroke."

"Butterfly stroke!" cried the young frog. "I always knew this was a backwater." He mused, "Tano Froggishimo . . . now he must be a member of the Japanese branch of our family." He shouted, "Japan, here I come!" and leapt ashore.

The first person he saw was a snail whom he hailed: "Hey, Slimy, how far is it to Japan?"

"A very, very long way," said the snail.

"For you, Slow Pants!" said the frog. "I'll ask someone else." He hopped away. He drew up on a hare and greeted him: "Hey, Buck Teeth, how far is it to Japan?"

"Not very far if you hurry," said the hare, and added under his breath, "and if your left leg wasn't shorter."

In this minuscule, but utterly charming little fantasy Dal Stivens, who recently sold a story to COLLIER'S, *has combined something of the irresistible magic of La Fontaine with a touch of modernity wholly enchanting.*

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"Okay, Teeth," said the frog and leapt into the sea. He went at his swimming vigorously, reaching forward with his arms and thrusting with his legs, and muttering, "Damned old-fashioned stroke! Blasted backwater!"

He swam for three days and nights. Then with his eyes cracking with exhaustion he crawled ashore. He saw a snail and croaked at him, "How far to Japan, House Bound?"

"Further than you think, Organ Stops," said the snail.

The frog limped on. Ten yards past the snail he turned round and looked hard at him. The frog hobbled on and met a hare. He rasped at him, "How far to Japan, Tomb Stones?"

"A hell of a long way for you, Hoppy, if you keep going round in circles," said the hare.

The frog gave up trying to swim to Japan. "Butterfly?" he mused. "One of them ought to know."

He saw a butterfly flitting past and called out, "Hey, just a minute, Play Boy."

"Can't wait," said the butterfly. "Got one day of life. Can't waste it on you."

"Okay, Casanova," said the frog.

He saw another butterfly and called out, "Hey, Socialite."

"Can't stop," said the butterfly. "Hellfire for you, Pompadour," said the frog. "I'll teach myself."

He sat and watched the butterflies tip-toeing from flower to flower for five minutes. Then he leapt up, crying, "Can't be much in it if those nit-wits can do it. The secret must be to poke your boko into a flower. Let's go."

After several attempts the frog found a chrysanthemum strong enough for his weight. He clambered up and pushed his nose into a bloom. In the same instant a bee stung him on the nose. The frog bounded up, clawing at his nose with both hands, did several back flips with the pain, and fell into the sea. He swam. He thrust with his hind legs and reached forward together with both hands, trying to scrape out the thing that was setting his nose on fire. So feverishly did he swipe at his nose that he sheered through the water at remarkable speed.

In no time, it seemed, he was lying on a strange shore with the smart in his nose just easing. Peering down short-sightedly at him was an alien frog who told him fervently, "That was the finest bit of butterfly swimming it has been my lot to witness, young man."

Talking round the corners of his swollen nose, the young frog said, "No picnic, Pop, but then, I suppose, all progress is painful."

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▶ We believe it was Rudyard Kipling who once wrote, "The fields of fantasy are very wide," and so, we might add, are the closely related realms of science fiction and detective fiction. Each presents a challenge to the imagination, an invitation to leave the world of the humdrum and the commonplace, and fare boldly forth in search of the beckoning pot of gold at the crest of imagination's rainbow. And we feel that Leslie Charteris stands well in the forefront as an undaunted and ebulliently ingenious guide in such a valiant undertaking.

▶ To our way of thinking THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE is a natural. Certainly there is no more widely known and beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than Simon Templar, alias The Saint. And certainly there is no man alive more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a mystery magazine than Simon's creator.

▶ Currently a resident of Florida, when not engaged in traveling as the spirit moves him, Charteris has seen himself, wearing the guise of debonair Simon Templar, appear in scores of books and hundreds of magazines, in dozens of movies, on the radio and currently in a hugely-syndicated comic strip.

▶ Make no mistake, Charteris and The Saint are oddly interchangeable—for like Simon, his author is casual and languid and manages to look like a Louise Quinze courtier even in huaraches and Bermuda shorts. It seems probable that Simon is actually the person Charteris sees when he looks in the shaving mirror. Apart from the two-in-one phase of his existence Charteris is an editor of shrewd and unerring taste. A sampling of the current issue—with a short novel by Craig Rice and short stories by Agatha Christie, Octavus Roy Cohen, William MacHarg, Horatio Winslow—will attest to that.

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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right then and there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it *fast* or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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